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MR. WYCHERLYS' WARDS

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MR. WYCHERLY'S WARDS

By L. ALLEN HARKER

AUTHOR OF "MISS ESPERANCE AND MR. WYCHERLY"

JOHN MURRAY

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To

MY DEAR FRIEND

JEAN MARGARET CARNEGIE BROWN

Emerson says, "To have a friend you must be a friend."
That, dear, is why you have so many.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	"THE FLITTIN'"	1
II.	THE HOUSE OPPOSITE	18
III.	THE PRINCESS	50
IV.	THE BEGGAR MAID	62
V.	THEIR MEETING	74
VI.	MR. WYCHERLY ADDS TO HIS RESPONSIBILITIES	89
VII.	JANE-ANNE SWEARS FEALTY	104
VIII.	JANE-ANNE ASSISTS PROVIDENCE	114
IX.	THE QUEST	126
X.	FORTUNE'S WHEEL	138
XI.	THE CULT OF BRUEY	151
XII.	FOUND	167
XIII.	A FAR CRY	180
XIV.	AN EXPERIMENT	193
XV.	THE PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY	208
XVI.	THE PURSUIT CONTINUED	222
XVII.	THE PHILOSOPHY OF EFFORT	236
XVIII.	GANTRY BILL	247
XIX.	THE STARLING FLIES AWAY	264

MR. WYCHERLY'S WARDS

CHAPTER I

"THE FLITTIN'"

"When lo, there came a rumour,
A whispering to me
Of the grey town, the fey town,
The town where I would be."

FRANCIS BRETT BRETT-SMITH.

THE village was thunderstruck. Nay, more; the village was disapproving, almost scandalised. It was astounded to the verge of incredulity when it heard that a man who had lived in its midst quietly and peaceably for five-and-twenty years was suddenly, and without any due warning whatsoever, going to remove to the south of England not only himself, but the entire household effects of a dwelling that had never belonged to him.

It is true that the minister pointed out to certain of these adverse critics that by her will Miss Esperance had left both house and furniture to Mr. Wycherly in trust for her great-nephews; but people shook their heads: "Once the bit things were awa' to Oxford wha kenned what he'd dae wi' them?"

Sueh eonscientious objeetors mistrusted Oxford, and they deeply distrusted the motives that led Mr. Wyeherly to go there in little more than a month after the death of his true and tried old friend.

That it was a return only made matters worse, and the postman, who was also one of the chureh elders, summed up the feelings of the community in the ominous words: "He has gone back to the husks."

Even Lady Alicia, who liked and trusted Mr. Wyeherly, thought it was odd of him to depart so soon, and that it would have been better to have the boys up to Scotland for their Easter holidays.

What nobody realised was that poor Mr. Wyeherly felt his loss so poignantly, missed the familiar, benefieent presence so cruelly, that he dreaded a like experience for the boys he loved. The "wee hoose" in the time of its mistress had always been an abode of ordered cheerfulness, and Mr. Wyeherly wanted that memory and no other to abide in the minds of the two boys.

It was all very well to point out to remonstrating neighbours that March and not May is "the term" in England; that he was not moving till April, and that the time would just coincide with their holidays and thus save Edmund and Montagu the very long journey to Burnhead. Neither of these were the real reasons.

The "wee hoose" had become intolerable to him. Hour by hour he found himself waiting, ever listening intently for the light, loved footstep; for the faint rustle that accompanies

gracious, gentle movements; for the sound of a kind and welcoming old voice. And there came no comfort to Mr. Wycherly, till one day in a letter from Montagu at Winchester he found these words: "I suppose now you will go back to Oxford. Mr. Holt thinks you ought, and I'm sure Aunt Esperance would like it. She always said she hoped you would go back when she wasn't there any more. It must be dreadfully lonely now at Remote, and it would be easier for us in the holidays."

"I suppose now you will go back to Oxford." All that day the sentence rang in Mr. Wycherly's head. That night for the first time since her death he slept well. He dreamed that he walked with Miss Esperance in the garden of New College beside the ancient city wall, and that she looked up at him, smiling, and said, "It is indeed good to be here."

Next day, as Robina, the servant, put it, "he took the train," and four days later returned to announce that he had rented a house in Oxford and was going there almost at once.

* * * * *

If Mr. Wycherly's sudden move was made chiefly with the hope of sparing the boys sadness and sense of bereavement in this, their first holidays without their aunt, that hope was abundantly fulfilled.

It was a most delightful house: an old, old house in Holywell with three gables resting on an oaken beam which, in its turn, was supported by oak corbels in the form of dragons and a

rotund, festive-looking demon who nevertheless clasped his hands over "the place where the doll's wax ends" as though he had a pain.

Two of the gables possessed large latticed windows, but the third was blank, having, however, a tiny window at the side which looked down the street towards New College.

At the back was a long crooked garden that widened out like a tennis racquet at the far end.

It was all very delightful and exciting while the furniture was going in and the three stayed at the King's Arms at the corner.

Edmund and Montagu between them took it upon themselves to settle the whereabouts of the furniture and drove the removal men nearly distracted by suggesting at least six positions for each thing as it was carried in. But finally Mr. Wycherly was bound to confess that there was a certain method in their apparent madness. For as the rooms in Holywell filled up, he found, that allowing for difference in their dimensions and, above all, their irregularity of shape, every big piece of furniture was placed in relation to the rest exactly as it had been in the small, square rooms at Remote.

Boys are very conservative, and in nothing more so than in their attachment to the familiar They pestered and worried that most patient foreman till each room contained exactly the same furniture, no more and no less, that had, as Edmund put it, "lived together" in their aunt's house.

Then appeared a cloud on the horizon. Lady Alicia, who loved arranging things for people, had very kindly written to a friend of her own at Abingdon, and through her had engaged "a thoroughly capable woman" to "do for" Mr. Wycherly in Oxford.

"She can get a young girl to help her if she finds it too much after you're settled, but you ought to try and do with one at first; for a move, and such a move—why couldn't you go into Edinburgh if you want society?—will about ruin you. And, remember, no English servant washes."

"Oh, Lady Alicia, I'm sure you are mistaken there," Mr. Wycherly exclaimed, indignant at this supposed slur on his countrywomen. "I'm sure they look even cleaner and neater than the Scotch."

"Bless the man! I'm not talking of themselves—I mean they won't do the washing, the clothes and sheets and things; you'll have to put it out or have someone in to do it. Is there a green?"

"There is a lawn," Mr. Wycherly said, dubiously—"it's rather a pleasant garden."

"Is there a copper?"

"I beg your pardon?" replied the bewildered Mr. Wycherly, thinking this must be some "appurtenance" to a garden of which he was ignorant.

"There, you see, there are probably hundreds of things missing in that house that ought to be in it. You'd better put out the washing."

Mr. Wycherly felt and looked distinctly relieved.

The smell of wet soapsuds that had always pervaded Remote on Monday mornings did not appeal to him.

And now, when all the furniture was in its place and the carpets laid; when the china and pots and pans had been unpacked by the removal men and laid upon shelves; when the beds had been set up and only awaited their customary coverings; on the very day that the "thoroughly capable woman" was to come and take possession of it all, there came a letter from her instead to the effect that "her mother was took bad suddint," and she couldn't leave home. Nor did she suggest any date in the near future when she would be at liberty to come. Moreover, she concluded this desolating intelligence with the remark, "after having thinking it over I should prefer to go where there's a missus, so I hopes you'll arrange according."

Here was a knock-down blow!

They found the letter in the box at the new house when they rushed there directly after breakfast to gloat over their possessions.

The wooden shutters were shut in the two downstairs sitting-rooms; three people formed a congested crowd in the tiny shallow entrance, even when one of the three was but ten years old. So they went through the parlour and climbed a steep and winding staircase to one of the two large front bedrooms. There, in the bright sunlight of an April morning, Mr. Wycherly read aloud this perturbing missive.

"Bother the woman's mother," cried Edmund,

who was not of a sympathetic disposition. "Let's do without one altogether, Guardie. We could pretend we're the Swiss Family Robinson and have awful fun."

"I fear," said Mr. Wycherly, sadly, "that I, personally, do not possess the ingenuity of the excellent father of that most resourceful family."

"Shall I telegraph to Lady Alicia?" asked Montagu, who had lately discovered the joys of the telegraph office. "She could poke up that friend of hers in Abingdon to find us an orphan."

"No!" replied Mr. Wycherly with decision. "We won't do that. We must manage our own affairs as best we can and not pester our friends with our misfortunes."

"How does one get servants?" asked Montagu.

Nobody answered. Even Edmund for once was at a loss. None of the three had ever heard the servant question discussed. Old Elsa had lived with Miss Esperance from girlhood; dying as she had lived in the service of her beloved mistress. Robina had come when the little boys were added to the household and remained till Mr. Wycherly left for Oxford, when she at last consented to marry "Sandie the Flesher," who had courted her for nine long years.

Mr. Wycherly sat down on a chair beside his bed immersed in thought. Montagu perched on the rail at the end of the bed and surveyed the street from this eminence. As there were neither curtains nor blinds in the window his view was unimpeded. Edmund walked about the room on his hands till he encountered a tintack that the

men had left, then he sat on the floor noisily sucking the wounded member.

It seemed that his gymnastic exercises had been mentally stimulating, for he took his hand out of his mouth to remark:

"What's 'A High-class Registry Office for Servants?'"

Mr. Wycherly turned to him in some excitement.

"I suppose a place where they keep the names of the disengaged upon their books to meet the needs of those who seek servants. Why? Have you seen one?"

Edmund nodded. "Yesterday, in yon street where you went to the bookseller. It was about three doors up, a dingy window with a wire blind and lots of wee cards with 'respectable' coming over and over again. They were all 'respectable' whether they were ten pounds or twenty-four. I read them while I was waiting for you."

"Dear me, Edmund," exclaimed Mr. Wycherly admiringly, "what an observant boy you are. I'll go there at once and make inquiries. In the meantime I daresay we could get a charwoman to come in and make up the beds for us, and so move in to-morrow as arranged. They can't all be very busy yet, as the men have not come up."

"But there's only three beds," Edmund objected; "she can't make them all day."

"She can do other things, doubtless," said Mr. Wycherly optimistically; "she'll need to cook for us and," with a wave of the hand, "dust, you know, and perhaps assist us to unpack some of

those cases that are as yet untouched. There are many ways in which she could be most useful."

"I'd rather have Swissed it," Edmund murmured sorrowfully.

"Shall we come with you?" asked Montagu, who had an undefined feeling that his guardian ought not to be left to do things alone.

"No," said Mr. Wycherly, rising hastily. "You might, if you would be so good, find the boxes that contain blankets and sheets and begin unpacking them. I'll go to that office at once."

He hurried away, walking fast through the sunny streets, so strange and yet so familiar, till he came to the window with the wire blind that Edmund had indicated. Here he paused, fixed his eyeglasses firmly on his nose and read the cards exhibited. Alas! they nearly all referred to the needs of the servantless, and only two emanated from handmaidens desirous of obtaining situations. Of these, one was a nursemaid and the other "as tweeny," a species unknown to Mr. Wycherly, and as her age was only fourteen he did not allow his mind to dwell upon her possibilities.

He opened the door and an automatic bell rang loudly. He shut the door, when it rang again, greatly to his distress. He seemed to be making so much noise.

The apartment was sparsely furnished with a largish table covered with rather tired-looking ledgers; two cane chairs stood in front of the table, while behind it was a larger leather-covered chair on which was seated a stout, formidable

woman, who glared rather than looked at Mr. Wycherly as he approached.

She really was of great bulk, with several chins and what dressmakers would call "a fine bust." Her garments were apparently extremely tight, for her every movement was attended by an ominous creaking. Her hair was frizzed in front right down to her light eyebrows; at the back it was braided in tight plaits. She regarded Mr. Wycherly with small, hostile eyes.

He had removed his hat on entrance, and stood before her with dignified white head bowed in deference towards her, courteously murmuring, "Good morning."

As she did not make any response, he continued, "I am in need of a competent cook-housekeeper, and thought perhaps——"

"'Ow many servants kep'?" she demanded with a fire and suddenness that startled Mr. Wycherly.

"I had thought of trying to do with one."

"'Ow many in fambly?" and this alarming woman opened one of the books in front of her and seized a pen. There was in her tone such a dreadful suggestion of, "Anything you may say will be used against you," that when she dipped her pen into the ink Mr. Wycherly positively trembled, and grasped the back of one of the cane chairs as a support.

"For the larger portion of the year I shall be alone," he said rather sadly, "but during the holidays my two wards——"

"Male or female?"

"Really," Mr. Wycherly remonstrated, "what has that got to do with it? As a matter of fact my wards are boys."

All this time she had been making entries in the ledger; now she looked up to fire off, abruptly as before:

"The booking fee is one-and-six."

Mr. Wycherly took a handful of silver out of his pocket and abstracted this sum and laid it upon the desk. She of the ledger ignored the offering and continued her cross-examination:

"What wages?"

Mr. Wycherly mentally invoked a blessing upon Lady Alicia's practical head as he replied quite glibly, "From twenty to twenty-five pounds, but she must be trustworthy and capable."

"What outings?"

Here was a poser! But the fighting spirit had been roused in Mr. Wycherly. He would not be browbeaten by this stout, ungracious person who took his eighteenpence, and so far had done nothing but ask questions, affording him no information whatsoever.

"That," he retorted with dignity, "can be arranged later on."

"Your name and address?" was the next query, and when he furnished this information, carefully spelling his name, it pained him inexpressibly to note that she wrote it down as "Witcherby," at the same time remarking in a rumbling tone indicative of displeasure, "Very old 'ouses, most inconvenient, most trying stairs. 'Ow soon do you want a general?"

"A what?" asked Mr. Wycherly, this time thoroughly mystified.

"A general, that's what she is if there 's no more kep'. You won't get no cook-'ousekeeper unless she 's to-'ave 'er meals along with you, and a little girl to do the rough work."

"She can't possibly have her meals with me," cried Mr. Wycherly, crimson at the very thought. "It would be most unpleasant—for both of us."

"Then, as I said, it's a general you wants."

"And have you upon your books any staid and respectable young woman—preferably an orphan—" Mr. Wycherly interpolated, remembering Montagu's suggestion, "who could come to us at once?"

"Not, so to speak, to-day, I 'aven't; but they often comes in of a Monday, and I'll let you know. I could send 'er along; it isn't far."

The ledger was shut with a bang as an intimation that the interview was at an end, and Mr. Wycherly fared forth into the street with heated brow and a sense that, in spite of his heroism in braving so dreadful a person, he was not much further on his quest. "Monday, she said," he kept repeating to himself, "and to-day is only Thursday."

When he got back to Holywell, the boys were standing at the front door on the look-out for him. They rushed towards him exclaiming in delighted chorus: "We've got a woman. We thought we'd ask at the King's Arms, and they told us of one."

"What? A servant?" asked Mr. Wycherly with incredulous joy.

"No, no, a day-body. The boots knew about her; she lives down Hell Lane, just about opposite."

"Edmund!" Mr. Wycherly remonstrated. "However did you get hold of that name?"

"Hoots!" replied Edmund. "Everyone calls it that. Her name is Griffin, and she's coming at once. Have *you* got one?"

"No," said Mr. Wycherly, "not yet. Boys, it's a most bewildering search. Can either of you tell me since when maid-servants have taken to call themselves after officers in the army? The rather alarming person in charge of that office informs me that what we require is a 'general.' Do you suppose that if we should need a younger maid to help her we must ask for a 'sub-lieutenant'?"

"Perhaps they are called generals when they're old," said Montagu thoughtfully; "at that rate we ought to call Mrs. Griffin a field-marshal. She's pretty old, I can tell you, but she's most agreeable."

"Probably," said Mr. Wycherly, "in time to come they will get tired of the army and take to the nomenclature of the Universities. Then we shall have provosts and deans and wardens. But I'm glad that you have been more successful than I have. I've no doubt we can manage with Mrs. Griffin until we get a maid of our own."

"I think it was mean of that body with the mother," said Edmund; "she didn't even say she'd come as soon as she could. But I think the

Griffin will be fun, and if she can't do it all we'll get the Mock-Turtle to help her."

"Was it very high-class, that registry?" he continued; "it didn't look at all grand outside."

"I cannot judge of its class, I have never been to such a place before and I earnestly hope I may never be called upon to go there again, for it is a species of inquisition, and they write your answers down in a book. A horrid experience." And Mr. Wycherly shuddered.

By this time they had reached the house and he was sitting, exhausted, in his arm-chair in his own dining-room. The boys had opened the shutters and casement, and in spite of a thick coating of dust everywhere it looked home-like and comfortable.

"*Richly* built, never pinchingly" is as true of ancient Oxford houses as of her colleges. There seemed some mysterious affinity between the queer old furniture from Remote and that infinitely older room. The horsehair sofa with the bandy legs and slippery seat that stood athwart the fireless hearth was in no way discordant with the beautiful stone fireplace and shallow mantelshelf.

Mr. Wycherly surveyed the scene with kind, pleased eyes; nor did he realise then that what made it all seem so endearing and familiar was the fact that on the horse-hair sofa there sprawled —"sat" is far too decorous a word—a lively boy of ten, with rumpled, curly, yellow hair and a rosy handsome face from which frank blue eyes looked forth upon a world that, so far, contained

little that he did not consider in the light of an adventure.

While balanced on the edge of the table—again "sat" is quite undescriptive—another boy swung his long legs while his hands were plunged deep in his trouser pockets. A tall, thin boy this, with grave dark eyes, long-lashed and gentle, and a scholar's forehead.

Montagu, nearly fourteen, had just reached the age when clothes seem always rather small, sleeves short, likewise trousers: when wrists are red and obtrusive and hair at the crown of the head stands straight on end.

Neither of the boys ever sat still except when reading. Then Montagu, at all events, was lost to the world. They frequently talked loudly and at the same time, and were noisy, gay and restless, as is the usual habit of their healthy kind.

Strange companions truly for a scholarly recluse! Yet the boys were absolutely at ease with and fearless of their guardian.

With him they were even more artlessly natural than with schoolfellows of their own age. Their affection for him was literally a part of their characters, and, in Montagu's case, passionately protective. The elder boy had already realised how singularly unfitted Mr. Wycherly was, both by temperament and habit, to grapple with practical difficulties.

"Ah'm awfu' hungry," said Edmund presently, in broadest Doric.

"Edmund," remarked his guardian, "I have noticed on several occasions since you returned

from school that you persist in talking exactly like the peasantry at Burnhead. Why?"

"Well, you see, Guardie, for one thing I'm afraid of forgetting it. And then, you know, it amuses the chaps. *They* admire it very much."

"But you never did it in Scotland," Mr. Wycherly expostulated.

"Oh, didn't I. Not to you and Aunt Esperance, perhaps, but you should have heard me when I got outside!"

"I don't like it, Edmund, and I wonder your masters have not found fault with you."

"They think I can't help it, and it makes them laugh—you should hear me say my collect exactly like Sandie Croall!"

"Indeed I wish to hear nothing of the kind," said Mr. Wycherly in dignified reproof. "I can't think why you should copy the lower classes in your mode of speech."

"I'm a Bethune," Edmund replied in an offended voice. "I *want* people to know I'm a Scot."

"Your name is quite enough to make them sure of that," Mr. Wycherly argued, "and you may take it from me that Scottish gentlemen don't talk in the least like Sandie Croall."

At that particular moment Edmund was busily engaged in doing a handspring on the end of the sofa, so he forbore to reply. The fact was, that like the immortal "Christina McNab" Edmund had, early in his career at school, decided that to be merely "Scotch" was ordinary and uninteresting, but to be "d——d Scotch" was both distinguished and amusing, and he speedily

attained to popularity and even a certain eminence among his schoolfellows when he persisted in answering every question with a broadness of vowel and welter of "r's" characteristic of those whom Mr. Wycherly called "the peasantry of Burnhead." Moreover, he used many homely and expressive adjectives that were seized upon by his companions as a new and sonorous form of slang. Altogether Edmund was a social success in the school world. His report was not quite equally enthusiastic, but, as he philosophically remarked to Montagu: "It would be monotonous for Guardie if we both had good reports, and yours makes you out to be a fearful smug."

Whereupon Montagu suitably chastised his younger brother with a slipper, and the subject was held over to the next debate.

Presently there came a meek little tinkle from the side-door bell.

"That'll be the Griffin," cried Edmund joyfully; "I'll open to her."

It *was* the Griffin, and their troubles began in earnest.

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OPPOSITE

"Still on the spire the pigeons flutter;
Still by the gateway flits the gown;
Still on the street, from corbel and gutter,
Faces of stone look down.

Faces of stone, and other faces. . . ."

A. T. QUILLER COUCH.

MRS. GRIFFIN was not in the least like her name. She was a sidling, snuffling, apologetic little woman, who, whenever a suggestion was made always acquiesced with breathless enthusiasm, gasping: "Yessir; suttingly sir; *any*think you please sir."

That night they dined at the comfortable King's Arms for the last time and moved in after breakfast on the morrow. Mrs. Griffin did not shine as a cook. Their first meal consisted of burnt chops, black outside and of an angry purple within, watery potatoes and a stony cauliflower. This was followed by a substantial apple dumpling whose paste strongly resembled caramels in its consistency, while the apples within were quite hard. Even the lumpy white sauce, that tasted chiefly of raw flour, hardly made this an appetising dish.

She had, it is true, by Mr. Wycherly's order, lit fires in all four front rooms. The bedrooms were over the two living-rooms, and, like them, were wainscotted, irregular in shape, and fairly large, light and well proportioned, each with wide casement window. Except the study, every room in the house had at least two doors, and between the two front bedrooms there was yet another in a delightful, passage-like recess. In Mr. Wycherly's study, which was on the first floor at the back — with a high oriel window that looked forth on the garden—no fire had been put as yet, for his books were not unpacked, but stood in great wooden cases, stacked against the wall, one on the top of the other, three deep. Wisps of straw and pieces of paper still lay about, and where his books were concerned Mr. Wycherly was quite practical.

During the day Mrs. Griffin, as she put it, "swep' up the bits" in the other rooms (Mr. Wycherly locked the study and carried the key), and volunteered to go out and "get in some stores" for the morrow. This offer he gratefully accepted, entrusting her with a couple of sovereigns to that end. It took her the whole afternoon, and she seemed to have patronised a variety of shops, for Mr. Wycherly, who remained in the house to look after it, was kept busy answering the side door and receiving parcels.

He had sent the boys to explore Oxford. They found the river and didn't get back till tea-time, a meal where the chief characteristics consisted of black and bitter tea and curiously bad butter.

They supped on tinned tongue and dry bread, and even the boys were glad to go to bed early in their grand new room.

The night before Mr. Wycherly left for England the minister came to see him. At first they talked of the move; of Oxford; of the great change it would make in the lives of the three most concerned. Then it was borne in upon Mr. Wycherly that Mr. Gloag was there for some special purpose and found it difficult to come to the point.

At last he did so; cleared his throat, looked hard at his host, and then said gravely: "I hope you fully realise, that in undertaking the sole guardianship of those two boys you must carry on the excellent religious training given them by Miss Esperance. There must be no break, no spiritual backwardness——"

"I assure you," Mr. Wycherly interposed, "that there is no lack of religious training in our English schools; it forms a large part——"

"That's as it may be," the minister interrupted. "It's the *home* religious training to which I referred, and it is that counts most in after life. For instance, now, did not Miss Esperance daily read the Bible with those boys when they were with her?"

"I believe she did," Mr. Wycherly replied meekly.

"Well then, what is to prevent you from doing the same and so carrying on her work?"

"I will do my best."

"Remember," said the minister, "we are bidden

to *search* the scriptures, and the young are not, as a rule, much given to doing it of their own accord."

"That is true," Mr. Wycherly agreed, wishing from his heart that they were, for then he would not be required to interfere.

"Then I may depend upon you?" asked the minister.

"As I said before, I will do my best," said Mr. Wycherly, but he gave no promise.

And now as he sat in his dusty dining-room—Mrs. Griffin's ministrations were confined to "the bits" and did not extend to the furniture—on this, the first evening in their new home, he heard the scampering feet over his head as the boys got ready for bed, and the minister's words came back to him. "He's right," he thought to himself, "it's what she would have wished," and spent as he was he went upstairs.

Their room was in terrible confusion, for both had begun to unpack, and got tired of it. Thus, garments were scattered on every chair and most of the floor. There were plenty of places to put things: all the deep old "presses" and wardrobes had come from Remote, and the house abounded in splendid cupboards; but so far nobody ever put anything away, and Mr. Wycherly wondered painfully how it was that Remote had always been such an orderly house.

He sat down on Edmund's bed. "Boys," he said, "you used always to read with Miss Esperance, didn't you?"

"Yes, Guardie," Montagu answered; then,

instantly understanding, he added gently: "Would you like us to do it with you?"

"I should," said Mr. Wycherly gratefully; "we'll each read part of the Bible every day, and I'd like to begin now. Can you find your Bibles?"

This entailed much searching and more strewing of garments, but finally the school Bibles were unearthed.

"Let's begin at the very beginning," Edmund suggested, "then it'll take us years and years only doing it in the holidays."

"Oh, but we'll read a good bit at a time," said Montagu, who disliked niggardly methods where books were concerned. "It won't take so long really."

"Well, anyway, Guardie, we can miss the 'begats,' can't we? and the 'did evils *in* the sight,'" Edmund said beseechingly.

"We'll see when we come to them," Mr. Wycherly answered. "Who will begin?"

Edmund elected to begin, and read Chapter I. of Genesis.

Montagu read Chapter II. and Mr. Wycherly Chapter III.; but he got interested and went on to Chapter IV. He had just reached the verse, "*And Cain talked with Abel, his brother: and it came to pass when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and slew him,*" when the book was pulled down gently by a small and grubby hand, "Thank you, Guardie, dear," Edmund said sweetly, "I don't want to tire you, and you know we never did more than

one chapter with Aunt Esperance. One between the three of us!"

"I always sympathise with Cain," Montagu remarked thoughtfully. "I'm perfectly certain Abel was an instructive fellow, always telling him if he'd only do things some other way how much better it would be. Younger brothers are like that," he added pointedly, looking at Edmund.

"That view of the case never struck me," said Mr. Wycherly.

"It always strikes me every time I hear it," Montagu said bitterly. "It's just what Edmund does. He makes me feel awfully Cainish sometimes, I can tell you; always telling me I ought to hold a bat this way, or I'd jump further if I took off that way, or something."

"Well, you're such an old foozle," cried Edmund with perfect good nature. "So slow."

"I do things differently from you, but I do most of 'em every bit as well."

"So you ought, you're so much older."

"All the more reason for you to shut up."

The conversation threatened to become acrimonious, so Mr. Wycherly intervened by asking mildly: "Is there anything either of you would like me to explain?"

"Oh, dear no," Edmund exclaimed heartily. "Not till we come to Revelations. Then it's all explanation. It takes Mr. Gloag an hour to explain one wee verse, so I fear we'll only be able to do about a word at a time."

"But you must not expect me," Mr Wycherly

cried in dismay, "to be able to explain things as fully as Mr. Gloag, who is a trained theologian."

"We shouldn't *like* you to be as long as Mr. Gloag, Guardie dear; we shouldn't like it at all," Montagu answered reassuringly.

Whereupon, much relieved, Mr. Wycherly bade his wards good-night, and departed downstairs again, where he sat for some considerable time pondering Montagu's view of the first fratricide. "It seems to me," he said to himself, "that it is I who will be the one to receive enlightenment."

It was three days since they had, as Mr. Wycherly put it, "come into residence," and during that time Mrs. Griffin's cooking had not improved. Neither had the house become less dusty or more tidy. The time was afternoon, about five o'clock, and they sat at tea; a singularly unappetising tea.

Smeary silver, cups and plates all bearing the impress of Mrs. Griffin's thumb, two plates of thick bread-and-butter and a tin of bloater-paste were placed upon a dirty tablecloth. Neither Mr. Wycherly nor the boys liked bloater-paste, but Mrs. Griffin did. Hence it graced the feast.

Edmund was tired of bad meals. The novelty, what he at first called the "Swissishness," was wearing off, and as he took his place at table that afternoon there flashed into his mind a vivid picture of the tea-table at Remote. Aunt Esperance sitting kind and smiling behind the brilliant silver teapot that reflected such funny-looking little boys; the white, white napery—

Aunt Esperance was so particular about table-cloths—laden with scones, such good scones, both plain and currant! Shortbread in a silver cake-basket; and jam—crystal dishes full of jam, two kinds, topaz-coloured and ruby.

Somehow the sight of that horrid tin of bloater-paste evoked a poignantly beatific vision of the jam. It was the jam broke Edmund down.

He gave a dry sob, laid his arms on the table and his head on his arms, wailing: "Oh, dear! oh, dear! I wish Aunt Esperance hadn't gone and died."

Mr. Wycherly started up, looking painfully distressed. Montagu ran round to his little brother and put his arm round his shoulder—at the same time he murmured to his guardian "It's the butter, it really is very bad."

"It's all bad," lamented Edmund; "we shall starve, all of us, if it goes on. One morning that bed-making body will come in and she'll find three skeletons. I know she will."

Mr. Wycherly sat down again. "Edmund, my dear little boy," he said brokenly, "I am so sorry, I ought not to have brought you here yet."

"Look, look at poor Guardie," whispered Montagu.

Edmund raised his head.

"Would you like me to telegraph to Lady Alicia and ask her to have you for the rest of the holidays? I know she would, and by-and-bye, surely, by-and-bye we shall find some one less incompetent than that—than Mrs. Griffin."

Edmund shook himself free of his brother's arm and literally flung himself upon his guardian, exclaiming vehemently: "No, no, I want to stay with you. It's just as bad for you."

It was worse, for Mr. Wycherly could not restore exhausted nature with liberal supplies of Banbury cakes and buns. For the last three days he had eaten hardly anything and was, moreover, seriously concerned that the boys were assuredly not getting proper food. He would have gone back with them to the King's Arms immediately he discovered how extremely limited were Mrs. Griffin's powers had it not been that just then he received the furniture remover's bill, and, as Lady Alicia had warned him, it was very heavy.

He had come into tea with a sore heart that afternoon, for Mrs. Griffin had half an hour before informed him that she could not come on the morrow; so that now even her poor help would be lost to them. She was going, she said, to her "sister-in-law" at Abingdon for Sunday, as she needed a rest.

"So much cookin' and cleanin' is what I ain't used to; no, not if it was ever so; and I can't keep on with it for long at a stretch. I'll come on Monday just to oblige you if so be as I'm up to it."

"I wish you had told me this sooner," Mr. Wycherly remonstrated, "then perhaps I might have been able to obtain help for to-morrow elsewhere."

But what they were to do on the morrow was

no concern of Mrs. Griffin's. It was an easy and lucrative place and she wanted no interlopers. But she also wanted her outing to Abingdon, and she was going.

Mr. Wycherly poured out the black tea and Edmund attacked a piece of bread-and-butter.

The red rep curtains from the dining-room at Remote were hung in the dining-room at Oxford, but they in no way shrouded its inmates from the public gaze except when they were drawn at night. The house stood right on the pavement; even a small child could see in, and a good many availed themselves of the privilege.

Over this room was the boys' bedroom. Here there were no "fixtures" on which to suspend curtains, nor did it strike either of the three most concerned that blinds or curtains were an immediate necessity. They had all lived in a house that stood so far from other houses (as its name signified) that such a contingency as prying neighbours never occurred to them, and it never entered their heads to concern themselves with those on the other side of the road.

Presently Mrs. Griffin brought in a note held gingerly between her finger and thumb, remarking that it was from the "lady as lives hopposite."

Mr. Wycherly opened it hastily, found he had mislaid his glasses, and handed it to Montagu to read.

Edmund immediately rushed round to assist Montagu, thinking it was probably an invitation and Edmund liked invitations.

Montagu read it slowly and impressively as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,

"I think it only right to inform you that I can see the young gentlemen performing their ablutions and dressing and undressing both when the light is on and in the morning. Such publicity is most distressing, and I venture to suggest that blinds or curtains should be affixed in their room without delay.

"Yours faithfully,

"SELINA BROOKS."

Mr. Wycherly sank back in his chair with a groan. "I quite forgot curtains and blinds," he exclaimed in bitter self-reproach. "There are none in my room either; do you suppose the people in the next house can see *me?*"

"Sure to!" cried Edmund gleefully; "they'll be writing next that they can see an *old* gentleman 'pa'forming his ablutions'; but I can't see how they do, for we all wash in the bath-room, and that's at the back. I suppose they see us washing our teeth and you shaving. I wonder if that's more depressing, or they don't mind so much?"

"But what can we do?" Mr. Wycherly exclaimed despairingly. "It is already Saturday evening and we ought to have blinds or something now, to-night. How do they fix blinds, by the way?"

Montagu went and stood at the window and gloomily surveyed the houses opposite.

"You can't see a thing in her house," he said

sadly. "There's white curtains with frills downstairs and a straight thing right across the windows upstairs, and a looking-glass in one window shows just above the straight thing. You've got that, you know, for shaving; we might put ours there, too, it would fill up a bit. It's against the wall just now because we liked to see out."

"Oh! they'd just keek round it," said Edmund. "We'd best nail a sheet across for to-night."

"But won't that look funny from outside?" Montagu objected.

"Not half so funny as us skipping about with nothing on," Edmund retorted.

Mr. Wycherly sat, his elbows on the table, his head in his hands: "Boys, boys, it is appalling that at the very outset we should have scandalised a neighbour and made ourselves a nuisance."

"Not a nuisance, Guardie," Edmund remonstrated; "she must have *liked* to watch us or she wouldn't have done it. If Mrs. Thingummy had kept behind her own curtains she couldn't have seen us so plain."

Here Mrs. Griffin tapped at the door again, opened it about three inches, and called through: "A lady to see you, sir."

"That'll be your one come to complain," Edmund whispered to his distracted guardian.

"Am I interrupting you? May I come in?" asked an exceedingly pleasant voice which was followed by a kind-looking, pretty young lady, who was rather surprised at her reception.

What she saw was a handsome, white-haired

old gentleman seated at a table with his back to the light. Ranged on either side of him were two boys who regarded her with looks of dark suspicion, and on the faces of all three dismay and consternation were writ large, while Edmund's face was both tear-stained and exceedingly dirty.

Mr. Wycherly rose hastily as she came in.

Pretty Mrs. Methuen, wife of one of the youngest dons in Oxford, was quite unused to manifestations other than those of pleasure at her approach, and she stopped abruptly just inside the door to remark rather incoherently :

" Perhaps it is too soon ; it may be inconvenient, but my husband asked me to call directly you arrived, to see if I could be of any use. He is still fishing in Hampshire, and as I passed I saw that you were here."

Mr. Wycherly let go of the table, which he had seized nervously, and advanced to shake her outstretched hand. Montagu pulled out a chair for her.

" Pray be seated," said Mr. Wycherly. " It is most kind of you to call. These are my wards."

The lady took the proffered chair and shook hands with the boys, who still looked dubious, although Edmund was distinctly attracted.

On Mr. Wycherly's gentle, scholarly face bewilderment struggled to break through the mask of polite interest through which he regarded his visitor.

" You've only just come, haven't you ? " she asked.

"We've been living in the house for three days, but we are far from being properly established; our servant has not arrived yet——"

"And we keep on finding out things we haven't got," Edmund interpolated.

"We hope to be a little more settled before term begins," Mr. Wycherly continued, ignoring Edmund.

"Have you been able to get everything you want?" asked the lady. "Should you need any information about the best shops—or the people who do things——"

"Ask about blinds!" whispered the irrepressible Edmund.

"You are most kind," Mr. Wycherly began, again ignoring his younger ward, "but——"

"Mr. Wycherly," the lady said suddenly, "I don't believe you have a ghost of an idea who I am. Did the woman not announce me? My husband is Westall Methuen, son of your old friend, and my father-in-law wrote saying that I was to be sure and call directly you arrived in case I could be of any use."

"I am ashamed to say," replied Mr. Wycherly, in tones full of courteous apology, "that if Mrs. Griffin did announce your name I did not catch it. I assure you——"

"She never said any name, just 'a lady,'" Edmund again interrupted, "and we thought you must be *her*."

"Were you expecting somebody dreadful that you all looked so horrified when I walked in?" asked Mrs. Methuen with laughter in her eyes, as

she turned to Edmund as being plainly the most communicative of the party.

"Well, we thought it very likely you had come to complain," Edmund continued, "and that is always rather beastly."

Mrs. Methuen did not possess six brothers without a familiarity with such possibilities. She did not press for an explanation, but tactfully changed the subject. Nor had she been in the room five minutes before she discovered that man and boys were all equally incapable of starting to housekeep, and that everything was in a desperately uncomfortable state. She herself had been at a "Hall." She knew Mrs. Griffin's type, and the very tea-table told its own dismal tale. She was young, kind-hearted, and energetic; nor had she been in Oxford long enough to achieve the indifference to the affairs of outsiders that is said to characterise the inhabitants of that city. So she promptly asked them all three to lunch on the morrow, nor would she take any denial; and she further suggested that the boys should walk back with her there and then so that they would know where to come.

The boys were charmed, and the three set off down the street, while Mr. Wycherly watched them from the front door till they turned the corner into Mansfield Road. He went up to his study unaccountably cheered and comforted.

"After all," he reflected, "I might ask that most charming young lady for advice if we fall into any serious dilemma. She looks so extremely alert and capable. Nevertheless, we must try to manage

our own affairs without plaguing kind friends to assist us."

He forgot all about the curtainless windows, and set himself to unpack the large case marked "Earlier Latin Authors" that stood by itself nearest the door.

Mrs. Methuen took Edmund by the arm, asking confidentially: "Now what mischief had you been up to when I came in? What did you expect the people to complain about? Don't tell me if you'd rather not, but I know a good deal about boys, and I might be able to help."

"It wasn't us," Edmund answered quite seriously. "It was Guardie. He was afraid of them grumbling. Our one had complained already."

"Mr. Wycherly!" Mrs. Methuen repeated in astonishment. "Oh, nonsense! I'm perfectly sure he would never do anything *anyone* could complain of."

"Not willingly," said Montagu, who began to think it was time he took a small part in the conversation, "but, you see, people in this town seem rather huffy about curtains and blinds and things, and we've always lived in the country, where no one could see in, so we never thought of it. We were so proud of having the electric light, too, but now it seems we'd have been better with just candles, for then, perhaps, Miss Selina Brooks wouldn't have written to complain. We'd best go to bed in the dark to-night."

"But do you mean to tell me someone wrote to complain that they could see you?"

"Yes, she did," cried Edmund. "'Pa'forming

our ablutions' and 'it was very depressing,' and Guardie thinks the lady in the house opposite him will be writing next—you see, there's two houses opposite us, we're kind of between them, and one can see right into our room and the other right into his; but his bed's in a deep recess, so perhaps he wasn't quite so depressing."

Mrs. Methuen stood still in the middle of the road, seemingly not quite sure whether to laugh or to cry. Finally she laughed, but her voice was not very steady as she said: "Oh, poor dear Mr. Wycherly, how dreadful!"

"Oh, do you think," cried Montagu, "that you could tell us where we could buy blinds or something now, to-night? Such things do worry him so, and then he blames himself and remembers Aunt Esperance is away, and it feels so sad somehow. You see she always did everything like that."

"But that's the very sort of thing I can help in," cried this kind and understanding young lady, and this time she took Montagu's arm, so that they all three were linked confidingly together. "Did you bring no curtains from Scotland?"

"I don't know what we brought. There's boxes and boxes not unpacked yet. Perhaps it will be better when the servant comes, but you never saw such a muddle as there is just now," groaned Montagu.

"But why isn't your servant there to help you? It seems to me that just now is the time when she could be of the very greatest use."

"She was coming," Edmund said gloomily,

"I expect she only meant to be kind," Mrs. Methuen suggested. "She probably realised that you, none of you, had thought of anyone seeing in."

"She might have waited a wee while," said Edmund, not at all disposed to take a charitable view of Miss Selina Brooks; "one can't have everything straight in a new house all in a minute. Why is your house like a church outside?"

Mrs. Methuen laughed. "It isn't in the least like a church inside. Come and see!" and as she opened the front door the boys followed her into a square hall furnished like a room. It was a big house, and extremely comfortable, with wide staircase and easy steps not half so steep as those in Holywell.

Mrs. Methuen ran up very fast, the boys after her.

She took them into a room where a plump, pink baby, about eighteen months old, had just been bathed and was sitting smiling and majestic on the nurse's knee. His clothing—it was a boy baby—as yet consisted of a flannel band; while a dab of violet powder on one cheek gave him a rakish air.

"My precious," said Mrs. Methuen, kissing the scantily-attired one, "you must look after these gentlemen for me for a few minutes"; and she forthwith vanished from the room.

The nurse smiled and nodded to them. The baby remarked, "Mamma!" to no one in particular, and looked puzzled and hurt that she

could tear herself away so soon. He wasn't used to it.

Edmund and Montagu advanced shyly towards their youthful host.

"Say how d'you do to the nice young gentlemen, like a good baby," said the nurse in tones that subtly combined command and supplication.

"Do," said the baby obediently.

"Will I turn for him?" asked Edmund, who had an idea that infants must always be amused or else they cried. Without waiting for an affirmative he flung himself over on his hands and turned Catherine wheels right round the room. Edmund was light and active and an adept in the art. The baby was charmed. His fat sides shook with delighted laughter, and he shouted gleefully, "Adain!"

Nurse deftly slipped a little shirt over his head and a flannel nightgown over that, and behold! he sat clothed and joyous on her knee before Edmund had finished his second acrobatic feat.

Edmund walked on his hands. He did handsprings. He turned somersaults, and finally played leap-frog with Montagu, but whatever he did that insatiable baby shouted, "Adain," bouncing up and down on his nurse's knee in enthusiastic appreciation of the entertainment.

Meanwhile Mrs. Methuen had found and packed up two pairs of thick cream-coloured casement curtains. She ran tapes in them ready to put up, for she was convinced there would be no rods; she also packed a hammer and nails, but she never knew what it was caused her to slip her

travelling flask of brandy into the pocket of her coat.

She fetched the boys, and her small son roared in indignation at their departure, which upset her extremely.

However, it was getting late and the windows in Holywell were bare.

Meanwhile Mr. Wycherly had been working very hard: stooping and lifting, carrying and stretching to arrange the Earlier Latin Authors in the top shelf of an empty bookcase. Some of the authors were heavy and calf-bound, and Mr. Wycherly, who had eaten hardly anything at all that day began to feel very tired. He was quite unused to violent exercise of any kind, and presently he became conscious of a most unpleasant pain in his left side. "A stitch, I suppose," he said to himself and went on stooping and lifting, for he had come to the last layer of books and wanted to feel that one case at any rate was unpacked.

The boys and Mrs. Methuen returned, but he didn't hear them.

"I'll go upstairs and begin at once," said Mrs. Methuen, "and you needn't tell Mr. Wycherly anything about it till I've gone."

She and Edmund went up into Mr. Wycherly's bedroom while Montagu tried to find his guardian. He was not in either of the sitting-rooms. That they had seen from the windows before they came in. Nor was he in the kitchen or the garden. At last Montagu bethought him of the hitherto unused study, climbed the steep, crooked stair-

case, and went down the sloping passage to look.

Mrs. Methuen was standing on a chair at one side of the window fastening the tape of a curtain round a nail she had just knocked in, while Edmund stood on another chair at the other side, holding the rest of the curtain that its fairness might not be sullied by contact with the extremely dusty floor, when Montagu burst into the room looking very frightened.

"D'you think you could come?" he asked breathlessly. "I'm afraid Guardie's ill or something, he's so white and he doesn't seem able to speak for gasping."

Down went the nice curtains in an untidy heap on the dressing-table as Mrs. Methuen leapt off the chair, seized something from her coat which was lying on the bed, and followed Montagu. Edmund had already gone.

Mr. Wycherly was sitting huddled up in his chair. His face looked wan and drawn in the fading light; he certainly was breathing heavily and with great difficulty. But when he saw Mrs. Methuen he made an ineffectual attempt to rise. She tore the silver cup from the bottom of the flask and tumbled the contents hastily into it.

"Don't try to get up," she said as she knelt down beside him; "you're a little faint; drink this, please, at once."

She literally poured the brandy down Mr. Wycherly's throat. "Clear those books off the sofa, boys," she commanded; "carefully now! "Ah, that's better. Now you must lie down

for a few minutes; it's bad to sit forward like that."

Somehow in three minutes this energetic young lady had taken entire command of the situation. Mr. Wycherly was helped on to the sofa, Edmund had fetched a rug to cover him, and she and Montagu were wrestling with the huge gothic window, which should have opened like a door in the centre and was, apparently, hermetically sealed. At last it yielded to their combined efforts, and the sweet, fresh evening air rushed into the room.

"Please finish the brandy," said Mrs. Methuen in precisely the same voice in which she would have adjured her baby not to leave any milk in his bottle. "You're completely done up; no proper food, no fresh air. I never felt anything like the atmosphere of this room; and then stooping and lifting heavy books on the top of all the rest. No wonder your heart gave out. I can't think why they make the cups of flasks such an awkward shape."

Mr. Wycherly meekly took the cup from her hand and drained it. Already his face looked less ashy and he could speak.

"I cannot tell you," he began——

"Don't try to tell us anything yet; for five minutes you are to stay perfectly quiet. I'll leave Montagu in charge, and he is not to allow you to stir till I come back. Come, Edmund."

Edmund's round face was very serious as he followed Mrs. Methuen back to the bedroom. Aunt Esperance, as he always put it, "was away."

Aunt Esperance, who had seemed a necessary part of life—beneficent, immutable, inevitable. Yet she had gone, and her place knew her no more. Might not a like thing happen to Mr Wycherly? And, if so, what was to become of him and Montagu?

Edmund was not imaginative. He lived his jolly life wholly without thought of the morrow. But at that moment he was startled into a realisation of how much he loved his guardian.

As once more he and Mrs. Methuen mounted their two chairs and started to put up the curtains again he looked across at her and noted with a sudden painful contraction of the heart that her face was very grave.

"You don't think, do you," he asked in a low voice, "that Guardie is going to die?"

Mrs. Methuen started and nearly dropped the curtain. "Oh, dear, no," she exclaimed hastily; "but you must take more care of him and not let him lift books or anything of that sort. When people are not very young they have to take things easily. You and Montagu must unpack the books and he can arrange them, but you must not let him stoop over the cases. Do you understand? He mustn't do it."

They finished the curtains in no time, and when Mrs. Methuen went back to the study Mr. Wycherly hastily arose from the sofa, where he had lain obediently ever since she put him there.

"I don't know how to thank you," he began——

"Please don't try," Mrs. Methuen said briskly. "The boys and I are having such fun, but I'm

sorry to say that I must—I simply must—give you a little lecture. Boys! someone is knocking at the front door; go down and see who it is while I scold Mr. Wycherly."

Mrs. Methuen's own kitchen-maid, accompanied by a stout, fresh-coloured woman, carrying a large brown-paper parcel, were at the door, and Mrs. Methuen herself came down in a minute or two, when she explained that the rosy woman was one Mrs. Dew, that she had come "to look after them," and would stay with them till they got a proper servant. Moreover, the kitchen-maid carried a large basket of provisions. The fires had gone out in both kitchen and dining-room, and the evening was growing chill. That kitchen-maid lit both in no time. Mr. Wycherly was brought downstairs and installed in his big chair by the dining-room fire, and Mrs. Methuen went home. Yet once more she came back that night, and she swept the two boys up to their room and insisted on their putting all their clothes in drawers and cupboards under her supervision, and she and Mrs. Dew did the same by Mr. Wycherly without informing him of the fact.

Nothing could less have resembled the methods of Mrs. Griffin than those of Mrs. Dew. With her advent everything was changed at the house in Holywell. Order was evolved out of chaos, dust disappeared as if by magic, boxes were unpacked and removed empty to the attic, while, most important of all, meals were punctual and appetising.

Mrs. Dew had the extremely deferent manner

of the well-trained servant who has "lived in good families." To Mr. Wycherly this manner was immensely soothing, coming as it did after his long experience of the dictatorial and somewhat familiar bearing of the Scottish servants at Remote. Mrs. Dew "knew her place" and kept to it rigidly, and Edmund found her rather unapproachable. Anything like reserve in his intercourse with his fellow-creatures was abhorrent to Edmund, and he pursued Mrs. Dew with questions as to her past, her present, and her future, getting, however, but small satisfaction for his pains.

"Have you any children, Mrs. Dew?" he demanded one day, when he had sought her in the kitchen for social purposes.

"No, sir, not of my own."

"Any grandchildren?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"No one belonging to you at all?"

"Of course, sir, I 'ave my relations, same as other folks."

"What sort of relations?"

"Well, for one, sir, I have a niece."

"Big or little?"

"About your own size, sir, though, I daresay, she's a bit older."

"Where does she live?"

"With me, sir, when she isn't at school. She's an orphan."

"Oh, like us. Where is she now?"

"Here, in Oxford."

"What's her name?"

"Jane-Anne, sir; but if I may say so, I don't think the kitchen's the proper place for a young gentleman like you."

"When shall I see Jane-Anne?"

"I don't suppose as you'll see her at all, sir, your paths in life being, so to speak, different."

Edmund sighed. "I wish you were a more telling sort of person, Mrs. Dew," he said sadly. "If you like to ask me any questions, you'll soon see what a lot I'd tell *you*."

"I hope I know my place better, sir!" Mrs. Dew remarked primly.

That afternoon he gave it up as a bad job.

Edmund did not forget his grudge against Miss Selina Brooks. By some curious mental process of unreasoning he traced Mr. Wycherly's sudden faintness, that had frightened them so much, to that good lady's letter about the curtainless windows. She had worried his Guardie, and therefore she was his enemy.

It did not in the least affect Edmund's opinion of her that Mr. Wycherly wrote a most courteous note thanking her for hers.

Edmund intended to be even with Miss Selina Brooks, but he bided his time.

The attics in Holywell were particularly large and splendid. There were only two, and they occupied the whole of the top floor, while each was reached by a separate staircase and had no communication with the other. In all, there were five different sets of stairs in that old house. One attic was dedicated to the reception of empty boxes; but the other—which possessed a heavenly

little crooked room opening out of it, in that third gable which boasted the small square window looking sideways down the street—Mr. Wycherly had given to the boys for their very own play-room.

At present there was nothing in it save two or three derelict chairs and a four-post bed with canopy and voluminous white dimity curtains. For some reason best known to herself, Mrs. Griffin had put up the curtains belonging to this bed which nobody wanted

Just outside one of the doors on that landing was a curious little cupboard with strong oak doors, not more than three feet high. This cupboard was very dark, apparently very deep, and quite devoid of shelves or pegs.

During their first uncomfortable days the boys had not felt particularly interested in cupboards; but as things grew more peaceful and accustomed, Edmund of the inquiring mind discovered this particular cubby-house. Montagu was not with him at the time, as, now that they were settled, he did Greek for an hour every morning with Mr. Wycherly just before luncheon.

Edmund thrust his arm in as far as it would go, but couldn't reach the back, though the floor seemed to slope upwards. Carefully propping the door open with a chair, he crawled in on hands and knees. Once in, he found that floor and roof sloped steeply upwards and the roof was just over his head; he couldn't even kneel. He crawled further in, quite a long way, and the tunnel turned sharply to the right. He could no longer see the

glimmer of light from the landing, but he had reached the end of the tunnel. At the same moment his head struck something that stuck out, and when he put up his hand he felt that it was a key by its shape. This was most exciting and must be investigated at once. There was no room to turn, so Edmund half crawled, half slid backwards out of the sloping tunnel, and flew downstairs to get some matches. To his joy he met nobody, which was as well, for he was covered with dust and cobwebs from head to foot. He rushed upstairs again feeling very adventurous and important, and once more crawled into the cupboard to the very end of the tunnel. He struck a match and found that he was up against another door, in the roof this time and precisely like the first one in every respect except that it had a large, heavy lock at one side, and in the lock was the rusty key that had hit him on the head. By no endeavour could Edmund get that key to turn. He lit match after match, throwing them carelessly on the old oak floor in a fashion that would have made Mr. Wycherly's hair stand on end had he seen it, and finally decided that alone he could not manage that door, and that Montagu must be taken into the secret

Montagu was still closeted with Mr. Wycherly, so Edmund wandered into the kitchen, where Mrs. Dew, exclaiming at his appearance, promptly dusted, brushed and washed him, much to his annoyance. However, he bore it with as good grace as possible, and then with disarming meekness asked: "What do you do, Mrs. Dew, when a

key won't turn; an old sort of key in an iron lock?"

"Have you been down in the cellar, Master Edmund?" Mrs. Dew asked suspiciously. "Is that where you got all that dust and cobwebs? You've no business there, you know, meddlin' with locks."

"I haven't been near the cellar," Edmund answered indignantly; "dust and cobwebs seem just to come and sit on me wherever I go; I can't help it. But what do you do to a box, now, that won't open?" he added diplomatically, "when the key sticks and won't turn?

"You wait till afternoon, sir, and I'll help you to open any box you want opened. But you might go and oil the lock if you like, then it can soak in till I come."

Edmund joyfully accepted the little bottle of oil and the feather that Mrs. Dew offered him, and flew upstairs again. This time he borrowed the candle from beside Mr. Wycherly's bed, lighted it, and took it with him.

Into his cupboard he went. He oiled and oiled: himself, the lock, the door and the floor. He tried the key with one hand, he tried it with two. He got fearfully hot and exceedingly cross, and still that key refused to turn. Finally, in a rage, he put his shoulders under the door and heaved with all his might. The door in the roof seemed to yield a little, and this inspired Edmund to further efforts. He shoved and shoved, and pushed and pushed, till at last, quite suddenly, the whole thing gave, opening upwards and outwards.

Edmund's head emerged into the light of day, and with rapture he discovered that he had only to step out on to the flat roof of a portion of the next house, which was considerably higher than Mr. Wycherly's.

His mysterious door was a skylight that had been boarded in. Why that curious tunnel was cut off from the rest of the house they never knew, but the little square of leads was a source of infinite joy to Edmund and Montagu till they grew too wide to wriggle through the passage. Nor did Edmund, with the curious reticence of children, inform either Mr. Wycherly or Mrs. Dew of his find.

A low parapet faced the street, and sloping slate roofs formed the two other sides of this delightful square. Edmund advanced to the edge of the parapet. He found that he looked straight across the road into a top bedroom of the house opposite. A bedroom so high that it had only curtains, ordinary dark curtains, not drawn at all; no short blind, and only a low dressing-table and small looking-glass to fill up the window. Edmund sat down hastily lest he should be seen, for there was somebody in the room opposite. Somebody with bare arms who was doing her hair.

Cautiously Edmund's head appeared above the parapet, and a look of vindictive glee overspread his hot and dirty face.

It was Miss Selina Brooks herself, and fate had delivered her into his hands.

The hair of Miss Selina Brooks was not abundant, and she added to it sundry tresses such as

are described by fashion-papers as "graceful adjuncts." Edmund waited till the adjuncts were all in their proper place. Then he descended into his passage, shut the oak skylight, shut also the little Gothic door leading to this undreamt-of paradise, retired to the bath-room to wash, lest Mrs. Dew should catch him again; and then, very quietly, went downstairs to the parlour, where, in the words of the French exercise, he sought "pens, ink and paper."

Edmund did not possess the pen of a ready writer; it was some time before he drafted a letter to his liking, but in its final form the missive ran thus:

"DEAR MADDUM,

"I think it only right to inform you that I can see you doing your hair, both what is on and what is off, and I find it very depressing. I therefore venture to suggest that a blind should be affixed without delay. It's worse than ablushuns

"Yours truly,

"EDMUND BETHUNE ESQRE."

This Edmund folded and placed in an envelope, which he sealed with his great-grandfather's seal. He then trotted across the road and dropped it into Miss Selina Brooks' letter-box.

Unlike Mr. Wycherly, Miss Brooks did not write to thank Edmund Bethune, Esqre., for his information; but that afternoon Nottingham lace curtains were put up at that top window, so closely drawn that not even a chink remained between them. When he beheld them Edmund smiled seraphically.

CHAPTER III

THE PRINCESS

"Thro' light and shadow thou dost range,
Sudden glances, sweet and strange,
Delicious spites and darling angers,
And airy forms of flitting change."

LORD TENNYSON.

THERE were white curtains at the windows in all the front rooms now. Mr. Wycherly's books were ranged on their appointed shelves, and the packing cases removed to the attic. Mrs. Dew was admitted to the study with duster and broom, and it began to look home-like and habitable. Once more did Mr. Wycherly sit at his knee-hole table engaged in his great work upon the Nikomachean ethics. The family was settling down.

"Will everybody come and see us now they know we're here?" asked Edmund, who had invaded the study one afternoon just after luncheon.

"I'm not at all sure that anyone will come and see us," Mr. Wycherly answered serenely. "Why should they?"

"Oh, well, for friendliness. How are we to get to know people if they don't come and see us? Shall we go and see them?"

"Certainly not," Mr. Wycherly said hastily. "That would be pushing and impertinent."

"But I like knowing folks," Edmund persisted. "I knew everybody at Burnhead."

"Burnhead is a little village. Oxford is a big town, and in big towns people are too busy to concern themselves about newcomers."

"Not Mrs. Methuen," Edmund argued. "She takes a great interest in us."

"She is a kind and gracious lady," said Mr. Wycherly, "but you mustn't expect everybody to be like Mrs. Methuen."

"I don't want them to be like her. I want them to be different; but I want some more people to come soon. I know the milkman, of course, and the butcher and two postmen (we'd only one in Burnhead), but that's not enough. You see they don't come in and have a crack. The butcher's an awfully nice man. I wish you knew him, Guardie. Why don't they ever come in?"

"I expect they are too busy. As it is, it seems to me that some people's meat must arrive very late if you have already found time to discover the butcher's amiable qualities during his morning visit."

"You should hear him whistle," Edmund persisted. "I'd give anything to whistle like him."

Mr. Wycherly did not answer. His mental attitude with regard to the butcher's musical efforts was coldly unsympathetic.

"Why do you never whistle, Guardie?"

"I don't feel the smallest desire to whistle."

"But *why* don't you?"

Just at this moment Mrs. Dew appeared bearing a tray with a visiting card upon it, while behind her came Montagu, breathless with excitement, to announce that "a lady and a gentleman and a wee girl were waiting in the parlour to see Mr. Wycherly."

On the card were the names of "Mr. and Mrs. William Wycherly."

"There, Edmund," said Mr. Wycherly, "you've got your wish. Here are visitors, and one of them is an old friend," and looking really pleased he hastened downstairs to the parlour, followed by the boys.

Seated in the deep window-seat was a tall young lady with fair hair; beside her was a little girl, and a gentleman was standing on the hearthrug. As Mr. Wycherly came in the lady crossed the room towards him holding out both her hands. She seemed extraordinarily glad to see him, and he held the friendly hands in his for quite a long time, while she laughed and blushed and introduced her husband. Then she turned to the boys: "Do neither of you remember me? Six years is a long time—but you might, Montagu?"

"Weren't you bonnie Margaret?" Montagu asked shyly.

"She *is* bonnie Margaret," said Mr. Wycherly, "and this is my nephew."

"Nobody is taking any notice of me," said a clear, high voice, and the handshaking group in the middle of the room turned to look at the

little figure standing all lonely in the window-seat.

"That is our daughter Herrick," laughed Mrs. Wycherly; "a very important person—quite unused to be overlooked."

This was evident. The small girl stood in the seat silhouetted against the window, a quaint, sedately fearless little figure with a somewhat reproving expression on the round face framed in a Dutch bonnet. Under the bonnet and over her shoulders billowed masses of yellow curls that broke into misty clouds of fine spun floss that caught and held the April sunshine. Her short-waisted coat, reaching nearly to her heels, was of a warm tan-colour, and she carried a large, imposing-looking muff of the same material bordered with fur.

Her mother lifted her down and led her to Mr. Wycherly, who bowed gravely over the small hand extended to him, but did not kiss her, as she evidently expected him to do; for she looked at him with large, trustful eyes, smiling the while a confident smile that showed even white teeth and deliciously uneven dimples in cheeks as fresh and pink as the almond blossom just then bursting into flower.

Mrs. William Wycherly was Lady Alicia's youngest daughter. Montagu vaguely remembered that there was a great fuss at the time of bonnie Margaret's marriage, and that he had heard it whispered that she had run away and that her mother was very angry. So he looked with great interest at the gracious and beautiful

young woman who had been so kind to them when they were little. Certainly retribution did not appear to have overtaken her. She looked radiantly well and happy, and Montagu decided that her husband looked kind and pleasant. Herrick stood leaning up against her mother's knee, silently taking stock first of Montagu, then of Edmund, then of Montagu again, turning her gravely scrutinising eyes from one to the other without a trace of embarrassment or shyness.

Presently Mr. Wycherly suggested that the boys should show Herrick the garden.

"Will you go with them, darling?" asked her mother, and Herrick, evidently satisfied with her investigations, declared her willingness to do so.

Once outside the parlour door, the steep, crooked staircase attracted her attention.

"I'd like to go up that; can I, boy?" she asked Edmund.

"Let's take her and show her our attic," he suggested. Edmund loved the attics.

"Shall I carry you?" asked Montagu; "it's a long stair."

"Certainly not," said the little girl with great dignity; "peoples as old as me always walk upstairs."

She fell up a good many times during the ascent, for she kept stepping on her long coat in front, and every time she tripped she said: "Oh, dear, how tahsome!"

At length they reached the attic, and the moment she saw the four-post bed with the curtains she made a dart towards it, crying

joyfully, "Oh, what a beautiful castle it will make. Now we can play my game."

She attempted to scramble up on to the bed, but again the coat got in the way and prevented her.

"Please take it off," she commanded, standing quite still, "and my bonnet."

Montagu unbuttoned the coat and untied the strings of the bonnet.

"That's better," she said; "now we can begin."

In a moment she was up on the bed and had darted behind the curtains, which she immediately drew closely till she was well hidden.

Montagu and Edmund looked at one another. What in the world did this portend?

Presently the curtains were parted a little, and a round, rosy face appeared in the aperture.

The boys stood at the end of the bed looking awkward and sheepish.

"Go on," she said impatiently; and she stamped her foot. "You must *say* it now."

"But we don't know what to say. Is it a game like proverbs, or what?" asked Edmund.

Herrick sighed, and stepped out from behind the curtains. "I suppose I must esplain," she said, "but I thought everybody knowed that game; it's my most favourite play. This," she said, waving her hand dramatically, "is a *gloomy* wood"—mere printers' ink can never depict the darkness and density of that wood as portrayed in Herrick's voice—"and you are a wandering prince."

"Which of us?" asked Edmund; "or are we both princes?

"No, there can't be two, there can only be one. You'd better be him," she said, pointing to Montagu, "you're the biggest, and the littler one can be his servant."

"A varlet," Montagu, who was just then much under the influence of Sir Walter Scott, suggested helpfully.

"A Scotch varlet, mind," Edmund stipulated.

"And presently you see," continued the little girl as though there had been no interruption of any kind, "a most frowning sort of castle, but just as you're wondering what you'll do, there appears at the window——"

"Castles haven't got windows," Edmund objected, "only kind of slits."

"This castle has a casement," Herrick responded with dignity. "Don't interrupt—and the curtains are drawn, but pesenly they are drawn back, and then you see *the* most beautiful princess you ever dreamed of——"

"And then?" asked Montagu.

"Why, you go down on your knees, of course, and say so. Now, let's begin; you do need such a lot of esplanation."

The princess retired behind her curtains, the prince and the varlet, who manifested an unseemly inclination to giggle, marched about the room.

"By my halidome!" exclaimed the prince, who had determined to play the part after the fashion of his then favourite characters, "this place is stoutly fortified."

"Will we win through, think ye?" asked the varlet familiarly.

"Hush!" said a voice from behind the curtains.

They were parted. First the ravishingly lovely countenance (it really was an adorably pretty little face, intensely solemn and earnest) appeared, then more of the princess, till she stood revealed in short embroidered muslin frock and a blue sash.

Flump!" Prince and varlet went down on their knees.

"What light from yonder window breaks?" exclaimed the prince, who had been doing *Romeo and Juliet* at school, and thought the quotation appropriate.

"An' wha'll yon lassie be, prince?" asked the varlet.

"I," said the princess slowly and solemnly, "*I* am the Princess Hildegarde——"

"Losh me!" interjected the varlet.

"Silence, dog!" said the prince severely. "How came you here, fair lady?"

"I am imprisoned in this dreadful castle," the princess continued plaintively, "by a wicked baron, an enemy of my kingly father."

"Where is the baron, lady? That we may slay him!" valiantly exclaimed the prince.

"Is your faither deed?" further inquired the varlet, who really was shockingly familiar.

"He died"—here the princess faltered and looked almost as though she might weep at any moment—"while I was yet a babe, nigh upon forty years ago."

"That's a long time," murmured the prince thoughtfully.

"It is," the princess agreed, "and meanwhile

my evil cousin has usurped the throne—— Now let us do it all over again." Here she spoke in a perfectly natural voice. "Perhaps you'll be a bit better this time. You ought to be much more surprised when I first appear; you ought to be struck dumb with amazement and delight, and then say all sorts of beautiful things. You should see my daddie do it."

"No, no," protested the varlet, as he arose and rubbed his knees, "we've got to find that old baron first and kill him. Wouldn't you like to be the baron now for a change?"

"Certainly not," said the princess with great dignity. "I'm only the princess always; we never have killings or horrid things of that sort. Are you ready?"

"Wouldn't you like to see the garden?" Montagu suggested; "it's very very pretty."

"I've seen plenty of gardens, thank you. This town is all over gardens. Are you ready?"

The princess was once more shrouded by her curtains. Edmund looked despairingly at Montagu.

"Shall we show her our secret place?" he whispered. "We simply can't play that silly old game all over again."

"She's got such a smart frock on," Montagu objected. "Suppose she got dirty."

"What secret place?" asked the princess, emerging from behind the curtains.

"It's a wee tunnel, and you go up it and come out on the roof, but you'd spoil your dress. Are you going to a party, that you're so fine?"

"I'm not fine," the princess cried indignantly. 'It's just an or'nary dress, it'll wash. *Do* show me the secret place."

"Will you promise not to play princess when we get there?" Edmund demanded.

"Not if you don't like it," she answered, looking very surprised; "but it's such a lovely game."

"Hush! they're calling us," Montagu exclaimed; "we must go down."

"But the secret place," cried Herrick. "I must see the secret place."

"You can't now; we must go. Next time, perhaps. All right, Guardie, we're coming. Here, you'd better let me carry you, the stairs are awfully steep. Bring her coat and things, Edmund."

This time the princess consented, and Montagu staggered downstairs bearing this precious and, for him, exceedingly heavy burden.

"What have you been doing, children?" Mrs. Wycherly asked.

"I didn't want to go in the garden," Herrick said, as if that explained everything. "So we went upstairs and there was a lovely bed and we played princess, but they're not good: They didn't do it really well. You and daddie are much better."

Mrs. Wycherly looked across at her husband and laughed. "One needs educating up to that game," she said. "I daresay Edmund and Montagu will play it very well when they've got little girls of their own."

"They didn't seem to 'preciate me much," the

child said, sadly, "but," tolerantly, "they did their best. I like the big one, he's more respectful."

When their visitors had gone, Edmund sought Mr. Wycherly and climbed upon his knee.

"Funny little kid, wasn't she?" he said.

"She is a remarkably beautiful child."

"Yes, she is nice to look at; all that hair's so jolly. We were very good to her, Guardie, really; we did everything she asked us once—but we really couldn't do it all over again."

"Do what all over again?"

"Oh, be princes and admire her, and rubbish. She wouldn't let us kill the wicked baron or anything really jolly like that"

"You've had very little to do with girls, ever," Mr. Wycherly said thoughtfully. "It is rather a pity. I sometimes wish we knew some nice little girls for you to play with They have, I expect, a refining influence."

"I don't want any refining influences if it's princesses and that sort of thing. I couldn't go on doing it to please anybody."

"She's only a baby, Edmund You liked all sorts of queer games when you were very little. I'm sure I'd be quite willing to play princes or anything else to please the young lady."

"And go down on your knees?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Wycherly, who, however, looked rather startled, "if it gave her pleasure."

"I suppose we gave her pleasure," Edmund grumbled, "but she didn't seem over-pleased, somehow. I can't think *what* she wanted, really."

"Perhaps she didn't know herself."

"Oh, yes, she did, for she was so sure we were doing it wrong."

"Perhaps," suggested Mr. Wycherly, with unconscious irony, "it is a better game for two."

"Well, you won't catch Montagu and me playing that game anyhow."

"Who knows—some day," said Mr. Wycherly.

CHAPTER IV

THE BEGGAR MAID

"Who loves me? dearest father, mother sweet,
I speak the names out sometimes by myself,
And make the silence shiver. They sound strange,
As Hindostani to an Ind-born man
Accustomed many years to English speech;
Or lovely poet-words grown obsolete,
Which will not leave off singing."

E. B. Browning.

That evening, after the princess and her parents had gone, Mrs. Dew asked Mr. Wycherly if she might "pop out" for an hour or so before supper just to run home and see that all was well.

Mrs. Dew always "popped," and according to herself, invariably ran, though such modes of progression seemed hardly in keeping with her stout, comfortable figure.

Before she left, she warned the boys to listen for knocks and rings during her absence—"though 'tisn't likely," she said, "as anyone'll come to the side-door; the tradespeople's all been."

Mr. Wycherly was shut in his study and the boys were preparing to go out into the garden where they assuredly would hear no knocks or

rings, when there came a faint and timid rap at the side door.

Edmund rushed to open it, and there stood a little girl of about twelve, who asked in a modest whisper: "Please, sir, can I see my aunt a minute?"

"Is Mrs. Dew your aunt?" Edmund demanded.

"Yes, sir, please, sir. Can I see her?"

"She's just gone out, not five minutes ago."

"Oh dear," sighed the little girl, "then I must have missed her."

"Was she going to see you, do you think?" Edmund asked. He always took the deepest interest in his fellow creatures.

"I expect so, but there's so many ways one can come. I shall be certain to miss her again going back and then——"

"And then," Edmund repeated.

"She'll be cross with me," the little girl replied, and smiled at Edmund.

Edmund smiled back, and a friendly, confidential spirit was at once established.

They looked at each other in silence for a minute.

The visitor was dressed in a brown stuff frock of some stiff, unyielding woollen material. She wore a buff coloured cape reaching to the waist and a hat of black straw, trimmed with a brown ribbon, of that inverted-pie-dish shape seemingly peculiar to female orphans educated in charitable institutions, for no other mortal ever wears such an one.

The pale face under the shadow of the inverted pie-dish was odd and arresting. The eyes, long-

lashed and brilliant, were really brown eyes, almost the colour of old, dark sherry; deep-set under delicately pencilled, very black eyebrows. Her mouth was rather large with well-cut full red lips and strong even white teeth; but her face was painfully thin, the cheeks so hollow and the chin so sharp that her eyes dominated everything, were out of proportion, and imparted to the beholder an uncomfortable sense of tragedy and gloom almost painful—until she smiled. Then the slumbering fire in the great eyes was quenched and they looked peaceful and pleasant as clear brown water under sunshine in a Devonshire trout stream.

"Hadn't you better come in and wait for your aunt?" Edmund suggested. "If you go back now you're certain to miss her."

"May I?" asked the little girl, smiling all over her face. "May I? I hope aunt won't mind."

"Come in," said Edmund, and shut the door.

The side-door opened straight into the scullery; then came the kitchen, large, orderly and comfortable; opening out of that was a housekeeper's room not yet completely furnished. Edmund led his guest through these apartments and across a narrow passage to the dining-room, where Montagu was sitting on the floor fastening on his pads.

"Here's Mrs. Dew's niece!" Edmund announced. "This is Montagu," he continued. "What's *your* name? We can't call you Mrs. Dew's niece all the time."

Montagu arose from the floor and shook hands in solemn silence after the manner of boys.

"My name's Jane-Anne, please, sir," said the little girl.

"My name's Edmund, please, miss," that youth remarked, grinning broadly.

Jane-Anne looked surprised. She saw nothing unusual in her mode of address.

For a minute the three stood and stared at each other.

"Would you like," Edmund asked in tones of honeyed politeness, "to see me bowl to him? I was just going to when you came."

"Please, sir," said Jane-Anne with commendable alacrity, "I should like it very much."

"Perhaps," Montagu suggested, though not over hopefully, "you'd like to field."

"Field," repeated Jane-Anne; "what's that?"

"Run after the ball when he hits it, and throw it back to me," Edmund explained.

"Oh, I could do that—do let me—it would be lovelly."

"Oh, you shall field as much as you like," Edmund promised graciously, and they all went into the garden.

Jane-Anne took off her hat and cape and hung them on the roller. It was then to be seen that her little nose was very straight and almost in a line with her forehead; no "dint," as Edmund called it, between the eyes. And her hair, parted in the centre from her brow to the nape of her neck, was black, immensely long and thick, and

tightly plaited in two big pig-tails, each tied with a crumpled bit of brown ribbon.

Jane-Anne could run very fast and was quite a fair catch, but she could not throw, as Montagu put it, "a hang," except in directions wholly undesirable. She very nearly flung one ball through Mr. Wycherly's study window in her endeavours to send it to Edmund bowling at the other end of the lawn. So it was settled that she must roll the ball along the grass, which she did with fair precision.

The grass was wet and spongy after heavy rain that morning. Jane-Anne's boots were heavy and clumsy, and when she slid, as she often did, she peeled the grass right off.

"I say," Montagu exclaimed, "you're making a frightful mess of the grass. I think you'd better stop fielding."

"I'll take them off," Jane-Anne exclaimed eagerly. "I can run much faster in my stockings."

This she did, regardless of the damp and unhindered by either of the boys, who thought it was very "sporting" of her.

"This afternoon," said Montagu, while she was unlacing them, "we had a little girl who insisted on playing at being a princess, and when you came I was afraid you'd want to play something of that sort too: perhaps the beggar maid, for a change."

"I shouldn't ever want to *play* that," she said very low, and to his dismay he noticed that her mouth drooped at the corners and her eyes were full of tears. She stooped her head over the boot

she was unlacing, but Montagu had seen her face.

"Oh, don't," he exclaimed. "Whatever is the matter? I was only in fun, and you know, in the story—it's a poem—I read it this very afternoon—the beggar-maid became the Queen."

"*Did* she?" cried Jane-Anne. "Are you sure? How lovelly! I'd like to play at being a princess," she added wistfully. "It's not much fun to play what you are already. You see I *am* a sort of beggar-maid."

"Oh, nonsense," said Montagu, "you're not in rags, your clothes look very strong and comfortable."

"They're strong, but they're not at all comfortable, they're so stiff;" and Jane-Anne rose lightly to her feet holding her arms out straight.

The brown garment was made after a fashion of many years ago—the sleeves and body tight and skimpy and narrow-chested; the skirt unnecessarily full and heavy.

"I think you're rather like Mrs. Noah," said Edmund, "only you've more hair and petticoats.'

Jane-Anne dropped her arms, stooped, and picked up the boots. "Aren't they frightful?" she said. "That's the asylum. We all have to wear them." Whereupon she cast the boots violently away from her and they bounded into the midst of a herbaceous border.

"Now," she said, with a little dancing movement indicative of relief, "you'll see that I *can* run."

"What was that you said about an asylum?

Edmund asked suspiciously. "I thought only mad people went to asylums."

"It's the Bainbridge Asylum for female orphans," Jane-Anne explained. "I'm female and I'm an orphan, and I wish I wasn't. I'm at school there and I hate it. But I'm generally ill, so I have to go to the hospital, and there it's lovelly."

"Why are you ill?" asked Edmund.

"It's so cold. If I go on being ill any more," she added, hopefully, "they won't keep me. It's because I'm an orphan I have to go—it makes it easier for aunt."

"But we're orphans, too, and we don't go to asylums," Edmund objected.

"Ah," said Jane-Anne, "you're rich, you see."

"Indeed we're not," said Montagu. "We're very poor really; Aunt Esperance said so."

"Poor!" echoed Jane-Anne scornfully, "and live in that beautiful house and have Aunt Martha for a servant. Oh, no, you can't be poor —not really."

"You see, there's Guardie, he takes care of us," Montagu explained, "but we're really orphans, too, you know."

"Are you? I'm so sorry," and she looked it.

"Oh, you needn't be a bit sorry for us. We're very jolly, thank you," and Edmund spoke in rather an offended tone. Pity was the last thing he expected or desired.

"I beg your pardon," she said quickly. "I know it's quite different for you, you're gentry you see."

The boys glanced at one another and were

horribly uncomfortable. In some queer, subconscious way they felt that they had unaccountably and unintentionally been "snobby" to Jane-Anne.

"Come on," said Edmund, "we're wasting time."

The game was keen and exciting. Jane-Anne flew about on her slender stockinged feet, and in spite of the stiff brown dress there was something singularly fleet and graceful in her movements.

The pleasant pinky light had already changed to grey when from the house there came the sound of a hand-bell rung vigorously.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Edmund, "that's for us to wash. Mrs. Dew must be home, and it's nearly supper-time."

Montagu was already half-way to the house when Jane-Anne caught Edmund by the arm, exclaiming, "Oh, let me get my boots. Don't go without me, and don't say I took them off. I don't know what aunt'd say. I'm sure she'll think it forward of me to play with you."

"Rubbish," said Edmund. "Hurry up. We asked you, and I hope you'll come often. You'd learn to chuck up a ball in time, and your running's simply ripping."

"Can the princess one throw balls?" Jane-Anne asked as she laced a boot at lightning speed.

"I don't know. I shouldn't think so; she's a very little kid, you know."

"I should like to see her; is she like a princess, really?"

"Well, she is rather. She has a demandly sort of way as if she expected everybody to do as she likes. You could see her if you came to-morrow morning. They're coming then, I know."

"I'd love to, but what would aunt say? I'm certain she wouldn't let me; not in the morning when she's so busy."

"You come to the front door and I'll let you in myself and take you up to the attic. She's certain to want to go back there. She doesn't seem to care for gardens."

"Oh, I do," cried Jane-Anne; "gardens are lovelly; but I'll come," she added excitedly. "I'll wait across the road, then you can see me from the window and let me in. Mind you don't forget."

They ran back to the house, and Edmund escorted Jane-Anne as far as the kitchen, where Mrs. Dew was standing at the fireplace dishing up.

"Jane-Anne came to see you, Mrs. Dew," Edmund announced loudly from the doorway, "but you'd just gone, so we asked her in to wait till you came back."

Mrs. Dew turned hastily and beheld her niece standing just behind her.

"But I've been back over an hour," Mrs. Dew exclaimed. "Wherever have you been since, Jane-Anne?"

"We asked her to play cricket with us," Edmund explained. "We never heard you come in. Good-bye, Jane-Anne, I must go and wash."

Vagging his curly head meaningly in token of theassignation for the morrow, Edmund departed, and Jane-Anne was left face to face with her aunt

"Vell!" that good woman ejaculated. "You've given me a pretty turn. I couldn't think where you vas gone; evening and all, and then to think you've been all this time playing with the young gentlemen like one of theirselves, and me never so much as dreaming where you was. What possessed you to come at all, Jane-Anne?"

"I vas lonely, Aunt Martha, I wanted to see you."

"You might have seen me over an hour ago if you'd 'a' chose. Well, now you must run back home before it gets dark. I can't let you wait for me to take you, there's all them dinner things to wash up. How hot you are, child! Mind you don't catch cold, and school beginning next week."

Jane-Anne looked wistfully at the sizzling cutlets in the frying-pan. She had started off before her tea and was very hungry. Her aunt had turned again to the range and was absorbed in lifting her cutlets out one by one and setting them to drain on a dish covered with white paper. As she carefully placed the last one, she turned and saw the flushed, wistful little face under the shadow of the inverted pie-dish.

"There, child," she said impatiently, "don't dawdle; it's late enough as it is, and Miss Morecraft'll be in a fine taking where you can have got to."

"Good-night, Aunt Martha," Jane-Anne sad obediently, and held up her face to be kissed.

Mrs. Dew stooped and kissed the child vith great kindness and felt in the pocket of her skirt. "You buy a cake for your supper," she said, pressing a penny into Jane-Anne's hand, "on your way back. I can't give you anything here, for the food's not mine, and to take my employer's victuals is what I never have done nor never will."

Jane-Anne flung her arms round her aunt's neck. "I do love you, Aunt Martha,' she whispered chokily.

"There, there, do get home, and remember that if so be as I'm out when you call, you're to go away again and not come in as bold as brass as if you was a friend of the family—playing with the young gentlemen and all. Folks ought to keep to their proper stations."

"But he asked me to come and play," Jane-Anne expostulated.

"Law bless you, Master Edmund'd ask in a tramp off the road, he's that full of caddle. Now look sharp, child, and get home."

Jane-Anne let herself out at the side-door and went through under the archway into the street. It was quite deserted, and as she passed the dining-room window she stopped, and pressing her face against the glass, looked in.

The electric light above the table had a rose-coloured shade and filled the room with a warm, soft light. A bright fire was burning on the hearth, for the evenings were still cold and a shrewd

wind blew down the empty street. To Jane-Anne, shivering now after being much too hot, the room looked inexpressibly comfortable and cheery.

Mr. Wycherly, his white hair shining with a silvery radiance, was standing with Montagu, newly promoted to a dinner-jacket, on the hearth-rug. His hand was on the boy's shoulder, and he smiled down at him, for Montagu was talking eagerly. There was evidently such perfect confidence and affection between what Jane-Anne called "the beautiful old gentleman" and the boy for whom she had just been fielding, that she felt a passionate desire to be there too. Surely anyone who looked so gracious and benign would have a kindly word for her. Should she rap at the window and attract their attention? Somehow she was certain that neither of them would be cross. Her eyes filled with tears, and the figures standing on the hearth-rug became blurred and indistinct, but she saw her aunt come in and cross towards the window to pull down the blind. Jane-Anne darted away, the big tears chasing each other down her cheeks.

"I wish I was that kind of orphan!" sobbed Jane-Anne.

CHAPTER V

THEIR MEETING

"For may not a person be only five,
And yet have the neatest of taste alive?
As a matter of fact, this one has views
Of the strictest sort as to frocks and shoes."

AUSTIN DOBSON.

LITTLE Herrick had no companions of her own age except for an occasional visit to cousins. Therefore did she invent comrades for herself and sternly impose them upon her family.

There was "Umpy dear," who, as his name suggested, was a meek, inefficient sort of person, often in trouble of various kinds, but always entirely amiable and desirous of pleasing. Quite other was "Mr. Woolykneeze," a stern, characterful personality who was quoted as an authority on all questions of manners and deportment. Even Janet, the commonsensical, trembled before Mr. Woolykneeze. One day at tea, having toothache, she had ventured to leave a piece of crust upon her plate, when Herrick remarked it and said sternly, "Mr. Woolykneeze thinks it's very impolite to leave bits, 'specially crusts," and poor Janet was fain to soak the crust in her tea and

mumble it that way rather than offend this mysterious and invisible censor.

When asked the age of "Umpy dear," Herrick always persisted that he was "three months and one day." He never grew any older, and his social solecisms were surely excusable in one of such tender age. "Mrs. Miff" was "Umpy dear's" mother, and her character was believed to have been founded on that of a charwoman who occasionally came to the house. Like her offspring she was meek and rather feckless, frequently arousing the wrath of Mr. Woolykneeze by her untidy and careless habits.

No one knew whence Herrick got the names or how she divined their various characters, but the people were there and had come to stay, and her family had to put up with them.

Her visit to Oxford opened up whole vistas of new possibilities. Here were two real boys with whom she had been allowed to play. It is true that they did not fall into her scheme with that instant understanding and obedience to which she was accustomed from her parents, but still they played after a fashion, a new and piquant fashion, and Herrick went back to the King's Arms after her visit to Holywell chattering incessantly of "Monkagu" and "Emmund," and demanding an instant return to their society. She wept bitterly when she found she could not go back that night, and declared that Mr. Woolykneeze and Umpy dear were equally upset. Her father suggested that these gentlemen might stroll round by themselves, when Herrick, regarding

him with tearful astonishment, sobbed out, "They'd never be so unkind as to go wivout me. Besides, Umpy dear might spill something on *your* uncle's best carpet. Can't *I* take them?"

"Not to-night, I fear."

"Why?"

"Because, you see, we've been already; it would be troublesome to go twice."

"Why would it be troublesome? I want to play with those little boys again."

"They're not very little boys, you know. They're a great deal bigger than you are. Perhaps they don't care to play with little girls."

At this Herrick opened her tearful eyes wide, repeating in astonishment, "Not care to play wiv *me?* Why not?"

"Well, you see, boys don't always care for the same games that girls like."

"But they're nice boys."

"I'm glad to hear it; still, you know, even nice boys don't always care to play with little girls."

Herrick sighed deeply. It was a horrid suggestion, the more so that she felt secretly assured that the princess game had not been a wild success.

"I want to see the varlet again," she persisted.

"Which is the varlet?"

"The littler one. I do want him to play wiv me."

"Perhaps he will to-morrow."

"D'rectly after breakfas', mind; you promise."

William Wycherly promised, and Herrick went to bed to dream that "Emmund" and "Monkagu" were walking down Holywell arm-in-arm with Umpy dear and Mr. Woolykneeze, and that they all four called at the hotel to take her for a walk in St. John's Gardens.

Next morning Herrick woke very early. Janet, her Scottish nurse, was having a fortnight's holiday, therefore at that time her mother was her sole guardian and attendant. Her bed was in a little dressing-room off that of her mother, the door between the two rooms being left open.

For a little while Herrick was content to sit up and wonder at the floors of the King's Arms Hotel, which are not as ordinary floors, but slope up and down in all sorts of unexpected directions. But she soon got tired of this, and so effectually roused her devoted parents that the three of them were down in the coffee-room and had finished breakfast by half-past eight.

"Now let us go and see *your* uncle, daddie dear," Herrick suggested as soon as she was lifted down from her chair. It seemed so extraordinary to her that anyone as old as her father should have an uncle, and she never failed to lay great stress upon the pronoun.

"We can't possibly invade them so early as this," Margaret said firmly; "they're probably not downstairs yet."

"Umpy dear thinks they're up and finished breakfast," Herrick remarked in a detached, impersonal tone, "*and* waiting for me."

"Well, I must beg to differ from Umpy dear.

We said we'd call about ten, and it won't be ten for an hour and a half yet. I must write some letters, and you must amuse yourself somehow while I do it. What toys will you have?"

"I'll look out of the window, sank you," Herrick remarked with dignity, and climbed upon a chair that she might see over the wire blind.

Her mother gave one amused glance at the small offended back turned towards her, and went upstairs to get her writing-case.

William Wycherly, seeing his daughter apparently engrossed in her inspection of the street, strolled to the bureau to look up trains, for they were to leave that afternoon.

No sooner was he out of sight than Herrick, muttering something to the effect that "Mr. Woolykneeze *knows* they're waiting," scrambled down from the chair and tip-toed out to the hall and thence into the street.

No one saw her, for none of the other sojourners at the King's Arms were down, and at that moment there was not even a waiter in the hall.

It was a perfect April morning. The sun shone clear and warm, and a shy, caressing wind lifted Herrick's curls and turned them to a haze of golden floss as she stepped daintily to the pavement and looked up street and down street carefully. Then, as fast as her sturdy legs would carry her, she ran till she reached Mr. Wycherly's gabled house.

But there she was met by a difficulty, for she

could reach neither knocker nor bell. For a moment she stood undecided in the doorway, but she was not lacking in resource. She couldn't quite see into the windows but she could reach them with her hand. She selected that on the left-hand side of the door and tapped on the glass. No response ; evidently there was no one in that room.

She tried the other. Still no one came to see who was there.

A passing boy, who noted her efforts, inquired good-naturedly : "Want to get in, missie ?"

"Please! Would you ring for me ?" she asked, smiling up at him in bewitching fashion, "there doesn't seem to be anybody in those rooms."

The boy rang loudly, knocked like a postman, and went up the street, where he waited a few doors off to see what happened.

The door was opened.

Mrs. Dew looked down at this hatless, golden-haired person in an elaborate blue linen smock the colour of her eyes, and recognised yesterday's visitor.

"Come in, my dear," she said hospitably "They're none of 'em down yet, but I can hear the young gentlemen hollerin' and rampagin', so they won't be long——" "Parents want to get her out of the way for a bit, I expect," she thought to herself, "her mamma must get pretty tired of it without no nurse."

Herrick followed Mrs. Dew into the dining-room; where breakfast was laid. "One minute,

my dear," said that good woman, "I must just pop back to my bacon and eggs, then I'll come and see to you."

But Herrick had not come to see Mrs. Dew. No sooner was she left alone than she sought the steep, narrow staircase and began to climb upstairs, whispering as she went, "You'd better take my hand, Umpy dear."

Two doors on the landing were open. The bathroom faced her, empty and very wet. She walked straight through the second open door on the other side of the landing and came upon Montagu brushing his hair at the glass, while Edmund, still in his shirt-sleeves, was practising a handspring on the end of his bed.

Montagu saw her reflected in the mirror and in speechless astonishment watched her as she paused well inside the doorway, announcing genially, "We've all three come."

Edmund's feet dropped to the floor with a flump.

"Mercy goodness!" Montagu ejaculated, and dashed for the door that led into Mr. Wycherly's room. On this he thumped loudly; without waiting for permission to enter, he opened it just wide enough to thrust in his head, and repeated, "They've all three come," in a penetrating whisper.

Mr. Wycherly, who was shaving, dropped his razor and turned a soapy and astonished countenance towards Montagu, exclaiming, "What! al——!" when he hastily changed his remark to: "They've come to breakfast with us, have

they? How exceedingly kind and friendly; run down at once and ask Mrs. Dew to lay three more places."

Herrick, staring at Edmund, heard this and said slowly: "They don't generally *lay* for them."

"What?" cried Edmund, immensely interested. "Don't you have plates and knives and things?"

"*I* do," said Herrick; "at least not knives 'cept a silver one, but they never do. They *will* be pleased."

"But do you mean to tell me," Edmund exclaimed, appalled at the eccentricity of the Wycherly *ménage* as revealed by their daughter, "that they eat things right off the cloth? Whatever do they do when there's gravy?"

"They never has gravy, poor dears," said Herrick sadly.

Edmund sighed. As old Elsa would have said, it was "ayont him"; and they both looked so nice, too. It was impossible to imagine Mr. and Mrs. Wycherly gnawing cutlets without so much as a plate between them. He got into his waistcoat and jacket in thoughtful silence. Montagu, who had not paid any attention to these astonishing revelations, being filled with hospitable concern as to whether there would be sufficient bacon and eggs for three extra persons, gave his hair one final thump with the brush and prepared to go downstairs.

"Stop!" cried Edmund, "you haven't said your prayers; hurry up!" Both boys knelt down by the bed, side by side, while Herrick watched their bowed heads with solemn interest.

"Why don't you begin?" she asked impatiently after a minute's silence.

"I've *done*," Edmund announced cheerfully, arising from his knees, when Montagu followed suit and rushed downstairs.

"But you didn't say anything."

"We don't say prayers out loud. It's only very little children say them out loud."

"Oh!" she said, as though suddenly enlightened. "Umpy dear says his very loud, but Mr. Woolykneeze looks into his hat like a grown-up genpleman; you can't hear a fing."

"But," Edmund objected, "one hasn't always got a hat in the morning," and opening Mr. Wycherly's door a very little, he called through: "I say, Guardie, do you always say your prayers into a hat?"

"Really, Edmund," said poor Mr. Wycherly, much perturbed by this second interruption, "I do so dislike doors being opened while I am shaving, especially when as in this instance——"

Edmund banged the door.

"I'm sure he doesn't," he said confidently. "He can't, for his hat's downstairs. P'raps that Mr. What's-is-name you mentioned has a special kind."

"Mr. Woolykneeze has hundreds of hats," Herrick announced magnificently.

"What a lot of room they must take up," said Edmund, much impressed.

"They do," said Herrick, "rooms *and* rooms."

"Is yon Mr. Woolykneeze a relation?" Edmund asked.

Herrick looked thoughtful. "Not exactly," she said slowly, "but he's a dear fend."

"How many pairs of trousers has he?"

Here was a poser. Herrick was not yet very familiar with the science of numbers. "I've not seen them all," she said cautiously; "he wears different ones every day. Let's come downstairs," she added quickly, lest he should ask more inconvenient questions. "You may show me the garden till bretfus is ready if you like."

By the time Mr. Wycherly came down, six places were laid for breakfast and Mrs. Dew had cooked three extra portions of bacon and eggs. She rang the bell loudly, and the boys with little Herrick came in from the garden.

"Perhaps you'd better run along to the King's Arms, Edmund, and tell my nephew and his wife that breakfast is ready," said Mr. Wycherly. "I thought, my dear," he added, turning towards Herrick, "that you said your father and mother had come. I hope they haven't gone away in despair because none of us were down."

Herrick looked up at him with candid, forget-me-not blue eyes.

"No," she said gravely, "I never said they'd come, for they didn't."

"But you did!" Montagu exclaimed. "You said, 'We've all three come' when you first came upstairs."

"So we have," she said. "Mr. Woolykneeze and Umpy dear and me; not mummy and daddie. I 'spect this is him now," as a loud knock and ring came at the front door.

And sure enough it was William Wycherly, so relieved to see his daughter safe that he forgot altogether to scold her for running away.

Margaret, thinking her husband was in charge of Herrick, had not hurried down, and he, returning to the empty coffee-room, concluded that Herrick had been fetched upstairs by her mother. It was not till Margaret came down that they discovered she had apparently vanished into space. William instantly fell into a panic and was for summoning a detective at once, when Margaret calmly interposed with the suggestion that he should first look for his daughter in his uncle's house. After considerable explanation which included the important personalities of Mr. Woolykneeze and Umpy dear, William was fain to go back to the King's Arms without his daughter, and Herrick sat at Mr. Wycherly's right hand, raised high in her chair upon a dictionary and Cruden's Concordance, and had breakfast all over again "wivout a bib" as she joyfully announced. The blue smock also bore testimony to that fact when the meal was over. The extra bacon and eggs were not wasted; Montagu and Edmund consumed the lot.

By the time breakfast was over it was nearly ten o'clock, and Edmund went to the front door to look for Jane-Anne. Sure enough she was there waiting in a doorway just down the street. Jane-Anne saw him and came out from her doorway, advancing rather timidly.

"Where's Aunt Martha?" she whispered.

"Upstairs, making beds," Edmund answered,

"so we can't go to the attics, but you can come into the garden. There's only one room looks out into the garden, and that's Guardie's study. He's gone there now, so Mrs. Dew won't be in that."

"Are you sure?" Jane-Anne whispered again. "She'd be awfully vexed if she saw me."

"Come on. That kid is here and she can't stop long, for we're all going out on the river. Hurry up if you really want to see her."

Jane-Anne came in sideways, as though by that means she made herself less conspicuous.

Herrick and Montagu were standing on the lawn under an apple tree, looking at some trumpet daffodils that were growing at its root. Herrick, very gently, was lifting each yellow bell to look inside it.

"Fairies live in these," she was saying, "but it's such a beautiful morning, I 'spect they've all flown away. You have to be very early to catch a fairy. Who's that with Edmund and what's she come for?"

"To see you, I think," Montagu replied. "Jane-Anne's her name and she's Mrs. Dew's niece."

Jane-Anne looked more haggard than ever this morning; pale to ghastliness, with dark shadows under her great eyes, she was singularly unattractive. Little Herrick felt both puzzled and repelled, but Margaret's teaching held good and the child walked forward holding out her hand with a little gracious air that was very captivating.

"How do you do?" said Herrick.

To her surprise, this strange-looking person

dropped on one knee before her, and taking the eggy little hand in both her own, kissed it.

"You're quite right," Jane-Anne remarked to Montagu over her shoulder, "she is like a princess."

"You may kiss me if you like," said Herrick graciously.

"If you please, miss, I'd rather you'd kiss me if you will," said Jane-Anne humbly. "I'd like to think anything so pretty as you had kissed me."

There was something so wistful and pathetic in the pale face that gazed so longingly into her own that little Herrick's warm heart was touched, and she flung her arms round Jane-Anne's neck and kissed her heartily.

"Thank you," said Jane-Anne as she rose up to her feet. "I shall never forget it, never."

"Now I," interposed Edmund, who had looked on with astounded disapprobation at this display of sentiment, "I should loathe and abominate anyone who kissed me, and I should try to forget it as soon as ever I could."

"So should I," Montagu agreed, "rather—but I suppose girls are different."

"Course they are," Herrick chimed in; "quite different and much better and more precious Daddie says so."

This point of view did not appeal to the boys.

"I don't know about 'precious,'" Edmund said scornfully. "It depends what you mean by precious."

"*I'm* precious," Herrick explained, "very, very

precious. That's why they were so afraid they'd lost me this morning, 'cause I'm so precious."

"I'm not," said Jane-Anne. "Female orphans never are so far as I can make out, but I'd like to be. Oh, it would be lovelly!"

Herrick had been staring hard at Jane-Anne for some minutes and at last could contain herself no longer.

"Why," she demanded, "do you wear such a funny hat? Do you like it?"

"Why d'you wear no hat at all?" Montagu interposed, vaguely aware that Herrick's question was not tactful.

"I wear a bonnet generally," Herrick remarked with dignity, "but I came out without it this morning 'cause they were in such a hurry. D'you like my smock?" she asked, turning to Jane-Anne, "Mummy made it."

"I like everything about you," Jane answered, with commendable enthusiasm. "I think you're a dear darling, and I hate *all* my clothes, but I can't go about without any because people would stare, beside it's generally too cold." And though the sun was shining hot on the lawn, Jane-Anne shivered.

Montagu looked at his watch.

"We'll have to go and get ready," he said. "We're all going on the river this morning—they're going away this afternoon—and I promised to take her back to the hotel at half-past ten to have her face washed. I wish you were coming too," he added kindly, "but it's not our party."

"Good-bye, little girl," said Herrick, "and I

hope you'll soon have a nicer hat, a *really* pretty one." And again Herrick kissed Jane-Anne.

"I'll let you out at the garden door," said Edmund, "then we shan't run into Mrs. Dew."

Quite silently Jane-Anne followed him to the end of the garden where there was a door in the wall. It was seldom used and the key was stiff, but by great efforts with both hands Edmund managed to turn it.

"Come again, soon," he said hospitably, "and we'll have some more cricket."

Jane-Anne murmured something unintelligible and passed out with bent head, the pie-dish effectually concealing her face. Edmund locked the door behind her and ran back to the house.

Outside the garden, in Saville Road, it was very quiet. It is true there was a distant rumble of carts from Holywell and a thrush was singing in one of Mr. Wycherly's apple-trees, but of human kind there wasn't a sign.

Jane-Anne went down on her knees, her shoulder pressed close against the garden door.

"Dear God," she prayed, "I do so want to be precious too. Please let me be precious to somebody. Please do."

CHAPTER VI

MR. WYCHERLY ADDS TO HIS RESPONSIBILITIES

"Some cheeses are made o' skim milk and some o' new milk, and it's no matter what you call 'em, you may tell which is which by the look and the smell."—ADAM BEDE.

NEXT day Mrs. Methuen took the boys out on the river for the whole afternoon. She invited Mr. Wycherly to go too, but the previous day had been his first experience of his wards as oarsmen, and he came to the conclusion that he preferred their society on land.

He was sitting at his writing-table in his study. The great oriel window was open and he could see that there were already patches of pink on the largest apple-tree, while the pear-trees had shed their snowy blossom and shone brilliantly green against the blue and cloudless sky.

It was a pleasant prospect from the study window: the long irregular strip of garden, with smoothly-shaven lawn in the centre and winding paths among borders where vegetables, fruit and flowers grew side by side in perfect amity.

The afternoon was singularly quiet, and, knowing Mr. Wycherly's habits, one would have felt that here was an excellent opportunity for his great work on the Nikomachean ethics, which had

been sadly neglected during the last strenuous weeks. Yet he neither took up the pen nor did he open any of the fat, calf-bound books piled one upon another at his elbow.

He sat very still, his long white hands resting idly on the arms of his chair, his kind eyes dreamy, his whole attitude eloquent of contented tranquillity.

Presently there came a modest tap at the study door, followed by the entrance of Mrs. Dew with her small round tray, and on it a rather dirty piece of paper which she presented to Mr. Wycherly with the announcement: "A young person to see you, sir."

Mr. Wycherly, roused from his agreeable reverie, looked bewildered.

"A young person?" he repeated vaguely, "to see *me*. What sort of a young person, Mrs. Dew?"

Mrs. Dew's face preserved the non-committal expression of one who has seen service in really good families, as she replied: "A young woman, sir, from the Registry Office, I should suppose."

Mr. Wycherly took the piece of paper off the tray and read as follows:

"*M. Fairfield exp: general character six months twelve months plain cooking age 23 very respectable.*"

There were no stops.

He looked beseechingly at Mrs. Dew, but her eyes were bent upon the carpet and she waited his pleasure a perfect monument of respectful detachment. Poor Mr. Wycherly had forgotten all about his search for the accomplished general.

Somewhere in the back of his brain there lurked the consciousness that Mrs. Dew was only a temporary blessing, really there "to oblige Mrs Methuen," till such time as a suitable and permanent servant should be obtained; but she fitted into her niche so perfectly, her sway was so benevolent, if a trifle despotic, that he began to look upon her as part of the established order of things, and, since his one visit to the High Class Registry Office, had made no effort of any kind to find her successor.

"Couldn't you see her for me, Mrs. Dew?" he entreated almost abjectly. "You could judge of her capabilities far better than I can."

Mrs. Dew raised her eyes and looked Mr. Wycherly full in the face, shaking her head the while: "No, sir, I think not, sir; it would be more satisfactory for all parties if you was to see the young person yourself."

Mr. Wycherly sighed heavily. "Do you think she seems likely to be suitable?"

Mrs. Dew's wholesome, good-natured face once more became sphinx-like. "I really couldn't say, sir. The appearance of the young women of the present day is often very much against them. We can only hope they're better servants than they look Shall I show her up here, sir?"

"Please, Mrs. Dew, but I do wish you could have interviewed her for me—wait one moment. Could you kindly suggest some of the questions I ought to ask her?"

Mr. Wycherly's voice betrayed his extreme perturbation, and he swung round in his revolving

chair almost as though he had thoughts of laying violent hands on Mrs. Dew to prevent her departure.

She paused on the threshold, and an imaginative person might perhaps have discovered a trace of pity in the glance she bent on Mr. Wycherly's agitated figure.

"The usual questions, sir, will, I should think, be quite sufficient."

And she shut the door behind her.

"The usual questions."

But what on earth were the usual questions? Mr. Wycherly could only think of those in the church Catechism. He picked up the dirty scrap of paper and read it again. "Exp." conveyed nothing to his mind. They were coming upstairs and he had no plan of campaign arranged. He felt absolutely forlorn and helpless. Suppose the young person didn't go away of her own accord? How could he ever suggest to her that the interview was at an end? He found himself longing for the moral support of Edmund, who, at all events, never lacked the power of asking questions; and no sort of young person, or, for the matter of that, old person either, could inspire him with the unreasoning terror his guardian felt at the prospect of the *tête-à-tête* thus imminent.

Mrs. Dew opened the door.

"The young person," she announced, and her disapproving expression changed to one of downright horror as Mr. Wycherly rose to his feet to receive his visitor.

She was a short, stout young woman, dressed in a bright blue coat and skirt of the shade known by drapers as "Royal." Her hat was large and was trimmed with tumbled pink roses. Her hair was frizzy and flamboyant and her boots creaked —Mr. Wycherly thought to himself—infernally.

"Pray be seated," he said courteously.

The young woman selected a chair as far off as possible and giggled affably.

"I understand," he began in a faint voice, "that you think you would be able to undertake the duties of—er—thorough general servant—that I believe is the correct term?"

"I always 'ave been general," the young woman replied, "though I did think of betterin myself, but Mrs. Councer she said as yours was a heasy place with no missus naggin' at you an' I thought it might suit me so I come along to have a look at things. It's a largish 'ouse for one but I suppose you don't 'ave much cookin' and waitin'."

"But there are three of us," Mr. Wycherly interposed eagerly. "I'm afraid that you would find it too much. You are rather young to undertake the entire management of this household. You see there would be the housekeeping to do —ordering, books to pay and so on, as well as the actual work."

"Oh, I could do all that," she replied confidently. "I'll do the shoppin' meself. I likes a run out between my reg'lar times an' I'd see they didn't cheat you in the books, puttin' down things you've never 'ad."

Miss Fairfield smiled happily at Mr. Wycherly. She liked his looks. She was sure he would be easy to live with and probably would be unaware of the existence of the followers. In common with every woman ever brought into personal relations with him, she was certain that he was in need of protection from the others, and decided there and then that it was her mission to see that he wasn't put upon by anybody else.

"When will you be requirin' my services?" she asked.

Mr. Wycherly gasped. "I should require to consider the question," he said feebly, "and it is usual, is it not, to give some——"

"My last mistress'll give me a character. I was there six months and she almost went down on 'er knees for me to stop; but I couldn't it was such an 'eavy place."

"Are you a good plain cook?" Mr. Wycherly asked, feeling here indeed was a leading question; some of Lady Alicia's instructions were gradually recurring to his mind. "Can you—er—do fish."

"Fry fish, why bless you, sir, my last place was a fried-fish shop, that's why I left. One gets tired of frying morning, noon and night. I can do plain roast and boiled and milk puddin's an' that, but I don't profess to do pastry."

"Thank you," said Mr. Wycherly, and paused. To get rid of her, he was on the point of saying that he would consider her qualifications and let her know his decision later, when his delicate sense of honour pointed out that such a course would not be quite straightforward dealing. She was a

terrible young woman, and his fastidious soul revolted from the very thought of the fried-fish shop, but she was young and she *was* a woman; it would not be fair to let her depart with the impression that she was a likely applicant when nothing on earth could induce him to employ her.

"I fear," he added gently, "that you are not quite experienced enough for us here, and therefore I will not trouble your late mistress with inquiries. I am sorry you should have had to come in vain—were you put to any expense?"

The girl gave a short laugh. "I've only come about half a mile," she said. "I'm sorry I don't suit you; I think I could be very 'appy in your situation."

Poor Mr. Wycherly looked most unhappy. He rose and rang the bell, saying:

"Mrs. Dew will show you the way out." He opened the door for her with the gravest courtesy and she creaked downstairs, wondering why she had not demanded at least "'arf a crownd" for expenses. "I'd 'a' got it too," she thought to herself, "but it never entered me 'ead to say nothin' to 'im but the plain truth an' 'im so civil and affable."

Mr. Wycherly went back to his chair and reached for a pamphlet dealing with the philosophy of Eubulides, which he thought might be soothing, but he had got no further than the statement that, "in Eubulides positive faith was superseded by delight in his own subtlety," when there came another knock at his door and again Mrs. Dew presented herself.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for venturing to intrude upon you," Mrs. Dew said respectfully, "but did you come to any arrangement with the young person?"

Mr. Wycherley laid down Eubulides. "Oh, dear, no," he groaned," shè was quite impossible. A most well-meaning girl, I am sure—but——"

"I feared so, sir, from her very flashy appearance, but one always hopes they may be better than their looks. Being only temporary I should like to know you'd found someone really suitable."

"Look here, Mrs. Dew," said Mr. Wycherly, suddenly taking heart of grace. "Why should you be only temporary? Could you not settle down with us? If you find the work too much when my wards are at home why not get a young girl to help you?"

"You're very kind, sir," said Mrs. Dew, fingering her apron and looking embarrassed, "but you see, I'm not without encumbrances. Husband I've none, children I've none, but what I have got is a niece and my bits of things. I'm bound to keep a little home for her in the holidays, that's why I can't take a permanent situation. You see, no one wants a child of twelve tacked on to a servant for weeks at a time."

"But listen, Mrs. Dew, there is the cottage, the little cottage off the kitchen where your bedroom is now—why not bring your things and furnish it and the housekeeper's room, and there would be a home for your niece."

Mrs. Dew turned very red. "It's most

uncommon kind of you, sir," she said, "but I shouldn't like to take advantage of you You see, it's just when the young gentlemen would be at home her holidays come, and perhaps——"

"That, surely, would be the very time when she could be of most use to you."

Mrs. Dew looked queerly at Mr. Wycherly, then, as though forcing herself to speak against her will, she said slowly: "You see, sir, I must be straightforward with you. If Jane-Anne was like some girls—like what I was myself, I shouldn't 'esitate to accept your very kind offer, for it would make a great difference to me. I hate choppin' and changin', and if I may make so bold, sir, you need a staid person here to look after things, but Jane-Anne's the sort of child what crops up continual. I *couldn't* promise for 'er as she'd keep 'erself to 'erself like she ought. I'd do my best, sir, to keep her in our own part of the 'ouse, but——"

Mrs. Dew paused and shook her head. Whenever she was very much in earnest she dropped into the speech of her youth; the aitchless, broad-vowelled talk of the Cotswold country whence she came.

"But I shall like to see your niece about the house," said Mr. Wycherly. "It will be pleasant to have a young girl growing up in our midst, good for me and for the boys."

Again Mrs. Dew gave Mr. Wycherly that queer look, half-scornful, half-admirative.

"You mustn't think, sir, that there's any real 'arm in Jane-Anne," she said earnestly. "There's

nothing of the minx about her, I will say that; but—I don't know how to put it without being hard on the child, and yet it wouldn't be fair to you, sir, to let her come without telling you——"

Again Mrs. Dew paused, and Mr. Wycherly looked rather anxious.

"She do make a sort of stir wherever she do go, and that's the long and shart of it." And Mrs. Dew relapsed into broadest Gloucestershire again as she blurted out this startling fact.

"Stir," Mr. Wycherly repeated, "stir? Do you mean that she is a particularly noisy child?"

"No, sir, not that. Jane-Anne isn't that; but she does things no other child ever thinks of doing and you can't seem to guard against it. The very first month she was at the asylum, she went and put 'er foot through a staircase window trying to see some soldiers as was passing. They had a board meeting about it."

Mr. Wycherly laughed. "It is unusual to put one's foot through a window, but surely that was an accident and not a moral offence?"

"It was a staircase window, as stretched all down one side of that wing," Mrs. Dew said solemnly, "and the banisters was up against it, and Jane-Anne she leant over cranin' 'er 'ead to see them soldiers, and she lost 'er balance and swung back and drove 'er foot right through and cut 'er leg so it bled dreadful."

"Poor child," said Mr. Wycherly, "that's one thing she is quite safe from here. There will be no temptation for her to put her feet through any

windows. Has she lost both her parents, Mrs. Dew?"

"That's another thing," said Mrs. Dew, dropping her voice mysteriously, "as I feel you ought to know, and that is, Jane-Anne's father was a Grecian."

"Really," Mr. Wycherly remarked, evidently quite unmoved by what Mrs. Dew considered a most damaging fact. "A Greek; how interesting. What was his name?"

"Staffrides," Mrs. Dew answered promptly, "At least that's what I call it, but he called it something longer. I've tried to English it as much as possible to match her really respectable Christian name."

"Do you happen to remember how it was spelt?" Mr. Wycherly asked.

"Yes, sir, S-T-A-V-R-I-D-E-S."

"Ah," Mr. Wycherly exclaimed; "now I've got it. Stavrides. Quite a common Greek name. What part of Greece did he come from?"

"Athens, sir, an' it was there he met my sister, who was lady's-maid to Mrs. Methuen's cousin. She'd been schoolroom-maid first of all, then when the young ladies grew up, they had her taught dressmaking and hairdressin' and took her everywhere with them. And when Lady Lettice married she took my sister Jane with her, and they travelled a lot, an' in Athens there was a carriage accident and my sister was thrown out and stunned, and this young man was passing and he picked her up, and it seems he fell in love with her there and then, for all her eye was swole up

with the bump she got—she was a very good-looking girl was Jane—anyway, 'e never rested till 'e'd married 'er. He was, I suppose, in a rather better position than she was, though, from bein' with the young ladies so constant, my sister seemed to have caught their pretty ways, and spoke exactly like them. She wasn't a bit like me," said Mrs. Dew simply, "you'd never 'ave thought we was sisters."

"What was Stavrides?" Mr. Wycherly asked.

"A sort of writer, sir, for newspapers. When they got married he came to London, and he was correspondent for some paper, some Grecian paper. It isn't a trade I thinks much on, but he earned good money and he insured his life heavy. And then, just like him it was, he forgot to pay the premium, fell ill and died all of a hurry when Jane-Anne was but four-year-old and my sister was left without anything at all but some forty pounds they 'ad in the bank."

"Poor thing," said Mr. Wycherly. "What did she do?"

"She did dressmaking, an' she took a lodger. Lady Lettice an' the young ladies 'elped her all they could, and she was doin' pretty well when she took an' died, an' she left Jane-Anne to me. My 'usban' was alive then—not as he was much use, an' I've done my best, but you see, I'm only a servant, an' not being out reg'lar makes it harder. Lord Dursley, he got her a nomination for the asylum at Baresfill, but I don't know if she can stop there. It's very cold up there in

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Northumberland, an' she's got a delicate chest. She've been there fifteen months, but 'as 'ad a lot of illness, an' I don't know if she can keep on. They don't like it, you see, sir, such a lot of illness."

"I understand it is some kind of an orphanage. The boys, you know, spoke to me about your niece, Mrs. Dew. I quite look forward to making her acquaintance. Do they receive any special training where she is?"

"Oh, yes, sir, it's a most superior place where they train them for young servants. They get their education and their clothes and good, thorough training in household duties, and when they're seventeen they put them out in good families that they know about, where they take an interest in the servants and treat them well."

"It sounds an admirable institution," said Mr. Wycherly. "Are the children happy there?"

"Most of the girls, sir, are happy as birds. It's a really good place, sir, plenty of wholesome food, nice airy rooms—but there! Jane-Anne she frets something dreadful. Sometimes I fear she'll never make a good dependable servant. If it's book-learnin', now, she's on to it like a cat on to a mouse. There's never no complaint there—but you never know what flightiness Jane-Anne'll be after."

"You see," Mr. Wycherly said indulgently, "she is only a child as yet. We must have patience. Anyway, Mrs. Dew, I hope that is settled. Send for your furniture and for Jane-Anne——"

"I am deeply obliged to you, sir," Mrs. Dew said earnestly, "and I will endeavour to serve you faithful. I will arrange with Miss Morecraft, her as I shares the 'ouse with, and I'll fetch Jane-Anne most thankfully when she can be moved——"

"Is she ill, then?"

"She's managed to get a most fearful cold on 'er chest; 'ow I can't conceive, but so it is; she's that hoarse and croupy, Miss Morecraft's kep' 'er in bed, and what I really came to ask, sir, was if I might pop round after supper to see 'ow the child is."

"By all means, Mrs. Dew, and whenever she can be moved, bring her here. Then you can look after her yourself."

Mr. Wycherly was very exhausted after this long conversation. He lay back in his chair and closed his eyes with a sense of well-earned repose. Whatever this child—this window-breaking, "cropping-up," generally disturbing little girl might be, she could not be one half so dreadful as the sort of servant Mr. Wycherly saw himself a thrall to if Mrs. Dew deserted him. Besides, Mrs. Dew, herself, would be there to keep her in order.

"These domestic cares are very disorganising," he reflected. He felt a positive distaste for the Migrarian school of Philosophy just then. The pamphlet on Eubulides lay open at his elbow but he ignored it. Instead, he went over to his book-case and took from it "Tristram Shandy," which he dearly loved. He opened it at random,

standing where he was, and his eyes fell on this passage :

"'*I can't get out—I can't get out,' said the starling.*

"*I stood looking at the bird ; and to every person who came through the passage, it ran fluttering to the side towards which they approached it, with the same lamentation of its captivity. 'I can't get out,' said the starling. 'God help thee!' said I, 'but I'll let thee out, cost what it will.'*"

"I wonder now," Mr. Wycherly thought to himself, "if that poor little half-Greek girl feels like Sterne's starling."

CHAPTER VII

JANE-ANNE SWEARS FEALTY

"Minds lead each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in numberless points, and at last greet each other at the journey's end. An old man and a child would talk together; and the old man be led on his path and the child left thinking."—JOHN KEATS.

JANE-ANNE had managed to get an exceedingly bad cold. To run on wet grass in stockings, if one wears the stockings all the evening afterwards, is not a wise proceeding for a delicate person. And when, the next day, she went to keep her tryst with Edmund, she knew very well that her lung was at its old tricks again; and that, had she been "at the Bainbridge," matron would have sent for the doctor. He would have listened at her back with his funny indiarubber tube, and would then have muttered something mysterious about "crepitation."

Jane-Anne had her own idea of "crepitation," which she abbreviated to "the creppits." She always pictured this unfortunate lung as a bent and aged person sidling along "with legs that went tap-lappetty like men that fear to fall."

It was tiresome, that lung; for whenever it began its tap-lappetty entertainment she felt so

ill. Her head ached and her legs seemed to weigh tons; her throat was hot and painful, and something seemed to flutter in the palms of her hands like an imprisoned bird.

More dead than alive she crawled back from her meeting with the princess to the stuffy little house "down in St. Clement's" that her aunt shared with Miss Morecraft, knowing full well that bed would be her portion directly anyone noticed how ill she looked.

Miss Morecraft, a dressmaker of severely respectable and melancholy temperament, was not observant, and it happened that just then she was very busy, as her customers were nearly all servants, and a new dress at Whitsuntide is a matter of sacred ritual in that class.

She did, it is true, remark that Jane-Anne was "a dainty feeder" when the child left her dinner almost untasted, but she did not "hold with pampering children," and having eaten her own dinner with considerable relish, went back to her work, having pressed Jane-Anne into the service to do some basting.

It was not till the child nearly fainted during the afternoon that Miss Morecraft awoke to the fact that Jane-Anne was really ill. She was quite kind-hearted, and was rather shocked that she should have made the child sew when she was evidently unfit for any effort of the kind. She put her to bed, made her a cup of tea, and persuaded the milkman to call and tell Mrs. Dew how matters were.

During the evening, Mrs. Dew "popped round,"

took Jane-Anne's temperature, rubbed her with liniment, scolded her well, kissed her and tucked her up in bed, and left her unaccountably cheered and comforted.

Next morning a strange, new doctor came. He, too, listened at Jane-Anne's back with his funny double telephone. He, too, shook his head and murmured something about crepitation and congestion, just like the doctor at "Bainbridge's."

"Shall I be able to go back to school?" Jane-Anne croaked eagerly. She was hoarse as a raven.

"When does school begin?" asked the doctor.

"It starts on the 5th of May. I have to go up on the 4th. It's such a long way."

"And this is the 29th of April. No, certainly you won't. You won't be fit for school for another fortnight, if then. Are you sorry?"

"No," said Jane-Anne candidly, "*I'm* not sorry, but Aunt Martha'll be very sorry."

The doctor laughed. "Well, you must do your best to get well, that's all; but it's no use your going anywhere till that lung has ceased crackling."

Miss Morecraft was far too busy to attend to Jane-Anne herself, and Mrs. Dew, recklessly extravagant if there was real cause for anxiety where her sister's child was concerned, sent in a trained nurse.

The nurse did her duty by Jane-Anne, but considered the post rather beneath her dignity, and was not interested in the fidgetty little girl

with the large eyes who sent up her temperature in an aggravating way by getting excited over trifles.

One evening, when the temperature was once more normal, Mrs. Dew informed Jane-Anne of her arrangement with Mr. Wycherly.

"Shall we really live there? Will it be our very own home—not shared?" the child demanded with incredulous delight.

"If there's any sharing it's Mr. Wycherly what shares his house with us," said Mrs. Dew. "I'm to have the cottage for myself, and we get the housekeeper's room for a sitting-room."

"And I shall live in the house with those nice boys?" Jane-Anne went on—"right in the same house."

"Yes," Mrs. Dew said; "but you must remember that you belong to the kitchen part and there must be no trespassin'. It would never do for you to be playin' with the young gentlemen like you was one of theirselves. You must understand that from the very first. Not but what they're very kind young gentlemen, and have ast after you over and over again, an' Mr. Wycherly likewise. Master Edmund, he wants to come and see you before he goes back to school."

"Oh, Aunt Martha, do let him. I should love it so. I promise I won't go up, I'll stay normal, I truly will."

"That I don't believe for one minute, Jane-Anne; why, if I was to take your temperature now—only I'm not going to—I know it'd be over

a hundred, with you so pink and all. No, I don't hold with Master Edmund coming to see you here. I've never been really wrop up in this place—too many threads and snippets about for my fancy, an' a smell like a draper's shop all day long. I've no wish as Master Edmund should see you here. Now don't you go cryin' out before you're hurt. Wait till I can tell you——"

"Oh, aunt, what—do be quick."

"The doctor says that seein' the weather's so good, you can be moved any time now provided you go straight to bed when you get there——"

"And you're going to move me—oh, Aunt Martha, how lovelly—to-day?"

"No, not to-day, but to-morrow, nurse'll bring you in a fly. And you must promise to keep calm and not go bouncin' and exclaimin' and runnin' up to a hundred over nothing at all."

"Aunt Martha, I'll behave like a stucky-image," Jane-Anne protested.

"You're more like a Jack-in-the-box than any image I've ever come across, but I do think it'll be better for me to have you where I can see to your food my own self. I don't seem to have no faith in that nurse's beef-tea nor 'er arraroot—lumpy stuff what I saw. An' if you're to be got strong enough to go back to the Bainbridge in the next three weeks (I don't know how they'll take this fresh worriment) you must be fed up. So now you know. You're to get up for your tea and go back to bed directly after, and you're to keep quiet and not get into a fantique nor go

makin' a palladum all about nothin'. Do you hear me, Jane-Anne?"

"Yes, Aunt Martha, but I think fantiques and palladums must be lovelly things; they sound so, and I long to make them, only I don't know how."

"It strikes me it's little else you'll ever make. Now lie down in bed, for I must run. Most considerate the master's been, letting me come off at all times to see you, and I hope you'll remember it and try and make yourself useful when you get about again. Good-bye, child, and we shan't be separated much longer, for which I thank the Lord as made us both."

It marked a change in Mrs. Dew's attitude towards the household in Holywell that she spoke of Mr. Wycherly as "the master." It suggested a permanence in their relations which would have been very reassuring to him had he heard it. Jane-Anne, too, noticed the phrase, and when her aunt was gone gleefully repeated to herself:

"See-saw, Margery Daw,
Jenny shall have a new master,
She shall have but a penny a day
Because she can work no faster."

"It's not Jenny really, it's Johnny, but Jenny does as well, and I'll work without the penny," thought Jane-Anne, "if only that beautiful old gentleman will be my master too."

Edmund had elected to take his guardian for a walk before tea, and led him over Magdalen

bridge, out into the Cowley Road, and finally into Jeune Street.

"Why are you taking me this way?" Mr. Wycherly asked. "It does not appear to me to be a particularly agreeable neighbourhood."

"It isn't," Edmund frankly agreed, "but now we're here we may as well look in and see Jane-Anne; she's to sit up a bit this afternoon, Mrs. Dew said so, and she said I needn't trouble to go and see her because she's coming to us to-morrow, but I think we ought to go, you know, especially as we're here. You haven't seen her, and she'll like coming better if she's seen you.'

"Edmund," said Mr. Wycherly, stopping in the middle of the road, "acknowledge that you have brought me here with the deliberate intention of visiting Mrs. Dew's niece."

"Well, Guardie, I *did* think of it. Don't *you* think it's the proper thing to do?"

By this time they had reached the door, whereupon Edmund knocked loudly without waiting for further discussion.

Miss Morecraft was much flustered.

"Yes, they could see the little girl if they didn't mind coming upstairs. She had just been got up and the nurse had gone out for a breath of fresh air. Very warm for the time of year, wasn't it."

Miss Morecraft opened the bedroom door, and without any announcement squeezed herself against the outer wall that Mr. Wycherly might enter.

Jane-Anne was seated in an armchair at the

window looking frail as a sigh. She wore a bright pink flannelette dressing-gown which accentuated her pallor. She loved this garment dearly, for dressing-gowns were not included in the uniform of the Bainbridge. Most of the girls were far too strong and healthy to need them, and Mrs. Dew had made this for Jane-Anne during one of her many illnesses.

Mr. Wycherly stood in the narrow doorway and the afternoon sun shone in on him, on his silvery hair and gentle, high-bred face.

"May we come in, my dear?" he asked. "Do you feel well enough to see us?"

Poor Jane-Anne was too weak to stand up and curtsey She flushed and paled, and paled and flushed as she turned her thin, sensitive little face towards Mr. Wycherly, but there was no mistaking the welcome in her great eyes, as she whispered: "Please do, sir, I'm so sorry I mayn't get up and put a chair for you."

"I'll get him a chair," said Edmund, pushing in under his guardian's arm, for the door was very narrow. "I thought I'd show him to you before you came to-morrow, then you won't feel strange with any of us."

There wasn't much room in that bedroom. The bed took up most of the floor and there was only one other chair besides Jane-Anne's, so Edmund sat on the end of the bed.

"You must make haste and get strong," Mr. Wycherly said kindly, "and if this fine weather goes on you'll be able to sit in the garden and get plenty of fresh air that way! And when you

are able we must see about a little drive. That ought to be good for you."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jane-Anne. "Oh! I don't know how I shall wait till to-morrow, I want to come so much."

"Let's get a cab and take her now," Edmund suggested; "it would be a lark, and such a surprise for Mrs. Dew."

Jane-Anne looked from Edmund to Mr. Wycherly, but saw that the enchanting proposition found no favour in his eyes.

"We mustn't do that," he said, "we haven't got the doctor's permission, and I don't think Mrs. Dew has got her room ready yet."

"This bed's coming for me to-morrow," Jane-Anne said shyly. "The things in this room are aunt's.'

"You won't be such a squash in the room you're going to have," Edmund remarked. "It's not a big room, but you'll be able to get round the furniture better."

"It will be so lovelly to have a little room of my own," Jane-Anne said softly.

"I hope you will sleep well in it, and get strong," said Mr. Wycherly. "And I'm sure Mrs. Dew will make it as pretty for you as possible. And now, my child, we must go. I don't think you are very fit for visitors as yet, and we mustn't tire you. We just looked in to tell you how welcome you will be to-morrow."

"We've got a bathroom, you know," Edmund said proudly, anxious to do the honours of their house. "Hot and cold and a squirty thing for

washing your head, you can use it for the rest of you, too, if you like, but it makes rather a mess. It's in the basin really, and we do each other sometimes. I do like a bathroom, don't you?"

Jane-Anne murmured her appreciation of that luxury, and Mr. Wycherly held out his hand to her, and she gave him hers; such a nervous little hand, so thin and hectic and fluttering: yet it grew still as it lay in his, and there seemed some subtle compact in its gentle clasp.

The child's eyes and the old man's met in a long gaze that asked and promised much.

The eager, hungry little face grew a thought dim to Mr. Wycherly, it was so wistful and so wan. Instead of good-bye, he said, "God bless you, my child, God bless you," and went out of the room rather quickly.

Edmund's farewells were longer, and Mr. Wycherly waited patiently for him in the sunny street. He had gone out so quietly that Miss Morecraft never heard him.

She heard Edmund, though, and hastened to the door to speed the parting guest.

Jane-Anne, faint with rapture, lay crumpled up in her chair.

"He looked at me," she whispered, "he looked at me just like he looked at him that night when I peeped through the window—just every bit as kind.

"See-saw, Margery Daw,
Jenny *has* got a new master."

CHAPTER VIII

JANE-ANNE ASSISTS PROVIDENCE

"To be sick is to enjoy monarchical prerogatives."—ELIA.

THE doctor was Mrs. Methuen's doctor, and she had told him something of Mrs. Dew and his little patient; of how that worthy woman had given up place after place in the last five years that she might keep "an 'ome" for her orphaned niece; of how Jane-Anne was born in Athens and brought to London when she was a baby; of the modest, beautiful lady's-maid, her mother, and the brilliant irresponsible young journalist, her father, so that he felt a kindly interest in his excitable little patient, and was sympathetically glad that "an 'ome" had been found for aunt and niece that seemed to promise rooted comfort and stability for both of them.

Therefore, when, on the morning fixed for Jane-Anne's removal to Holywell, he came to sanction or forbid that removal, he refrained from taking her temperature and said that the child could go.

Whereupon Jane-Anne's strength was increased tenfold, so that when she was dressed

she walked across the room by herself, and sat in a chair by the window while the nurse packed her yellow tin trunk.

Then came the great, the tremendous moment when the fly stood before the door, and the strong young nurse carried her downstairs and placed her in it, with a cushion for her back and a rug sent by Mr. Wycherly over her knees.

The drive passed like a brilliant dream. The men were up and the busy streets were full of bustling life and youthful jollity. Jane-Anne sat forward in her seat, the wavering colour vivid in her cheeks, and even the inverted pie-dish could not wholly shadow the bright gaiety of her eyes. All too soon it was over and they stopped before the archway in Holywell, where Mrs. Dew was waiting to help her niece in at the side door.

It seemed a little hard to be hustled up to her aunt's room and there and then undressed and put to bed—a tame ending to so thrilling an experience; but once between the sheets Jane-Anne discovered that she was unaccountably and extraordinarily tired. She meekly drank the egg beaten up in warm milk that her aunt brought her, lay back on the pillow, and at once fell fast asleep.

Since term began Edmund had been exceedingly busy. Never before had he seen so many young men gathered together.

Hitherto his acquaintance had lain almost exclusively among elderly persons or boys of his own age. To be sure there were two youngish masters at his preparatory school, but the mere

fact that they were masters set them on a distant and undesirable plane for Edmund.

But now young men, *young* men were all around him . in the houses opposite, on the pavements, in the hitherto so stately and silent quadrangles, on the river, in the playing fields.

One night as he lay in bed Edmund had heard a great many cabs plying up and down Holywell, and in the morning this transformation had come to pass. The tide of youthful life flooded every corner. Even the grave grey buildings seemed to open sleepy eyes and laugh and wink at one another in enjoyment of this resistless torrent, and all the inherent sociability in Edmund's nature gushed forth to join and mingle in the jocund stream.

Before three days had passed he had friends in half a dozen colleges. His method of procedure was quite simple. He sallied forth without Montagu, who was shy and exclusive and would have died rather than address a stranger without legitimate cause, and selecting an apparently amiable and manifestly idle youth, asked him the way somewhere in broadest Doric. On two occasions he happened to hit upon a fellow-countryman, and directly he discovered this he spoke in an ordinary way, and they were friends at once. He generally explained exhaustively who he was and whence he came, where he lived and the resources of the establishment in Holywell, and his new-found friends evidently found his conversation amusing, for they neither snubbed nor checked his garrulity.

On the day of Jane-Anne's arrival he had been out all the morning finding his way about Oxford by the means indicated, and only returned just as Mrs. Dew was laying luncheon.

"Is Jane-Anne not coming till afternoon?" he asked.

"Jane-Anne's here, Master Edmund, been here these two hours."

"Here! and we've never been told nor seen her. Where is she?"

"Sound asleep in my bed, she's that weak—but I don't believe moving her's done her a bit of harm; she's sleeping like a baby and looks that contented——"

"Can we go and look at her?" asked Montagu.

"No, sir, please, sir, I'd rather she slep' as long as she can. She's not slep' much this last week, an' I shall let her be till she wakes."

"Will you tell us whenever she wakes," Edmund persisted. "You see, we go back to school in two days now, so we shan't see very much of her, 'specially if we don't begin at once."

"You young gentlemen had better keep on with your own doin's and never mind Jane-Anne. She's got to go to school, too—soon as she's well enough," said Mrs. Dew primly. She set the last spoon and fork symmetrically in their places and went back to the kitchen to dish up lunch.

Edmund looked across at Montagu. "I shall stop in this afternoon, and *I'm going to see Jane-Anne*," he whispered obstinately; "she's in our house."

"So'm I," said Montagu with brief decision.

The bed and "bits of furniture" came from Jeune Street in the afternoon, and the noise of the men carrying things up the uncarpeted stairs woke Jane-Anne, who lay for a minute staring at the unfamiliar room and wondering where she was.

It was a fairly large room with a wide latticed window that overlooked the stone-cutter's yard, for the cottage was to the side of the house and its three windows looked that way. Clean muslin curtains hung at the window, so that Jane-Anne couldn't see out except when they moved with the breeze. The ceiling was low, and an oak beam crossed it. Most of the rooms in the main part of the house were panelled, but here they were papered, and the paper was of a cheerful chintzy pattern with garlands of little pink roses.

The furniture was all of brightly-polished mahogany that had been in Elsa's room at Remote, and it had that characteristic individual look only to be found in old furniture well tended by careful hands through many years.

The Chippendale Talboys had a scroll top with a pedestal in the centre, and on that pedestal was a little brass owl. The handles had lost their lacquer with time, but the warm red wood was mirror-like in its brightness, and in the great "press"—a cupboard in two divisions with deep sliding shelves—Jane-Anne watched the reflection of the fluttering curtain with sleepy satisfaction.

She had no idea why she liked these things so much better than the painted wood that furnished the bedroom in Jeune Street, but she did like them amazingly, and their presence filled her with such satisfaction as caused her for a little while to forget how exceedingly hungry she was.

Presently the door was opened a little way and a fair curly head was poked through cautiously. Jane-Anne was lying with her back to the door, and all that was visible of her was a night of black hair streaming over the quilt and a long slender mound in the bed where her body lay. She was so still that Edmund thought she was asleep, and was going away again when something, some tiny sound, caused her to turn round, and she saw him.

Edmund vanished like a flash and she heard his stentorian voice proclaiming: "She's awake, Mrs. Dew; you can bring that chicken."

Then he returned, and nodding at her in most friendly fashion seated himself at the end of the bed, remarking:

"What an awful lot of hair you've got; isn't it frightfully hot?"

"I can never keep the ribbons on it in bed. I don't mind it. I rather like to be hot."

The two stared at each other, and Edmund decided that Jane-Anne looked nicer in bed than when she was up. The soft, shadowy masses of her hair were infinitely more becoming than the pie-dish. Her forehead was smooth and placid. There was no deep wrinkle between her black eyebrows.

"I'm glad you're here," said Edmund genially; "but it's a pity you're in bed. You might have done some more fielding if you'd been up."

"I'm very sorry I can't run after balls for you, sir," Jane-Anne said meekly, "but I can't be sorry I'm in bed, for if I wasn't I'd be going back to the Bainbridge almost at once, and now doctor says I can't go for another fortnight."

"And you're glad not to go? Why?"

"Because——" said Jane-Anne; but at this moment Mrs. Dew appeared with a tray. She swept Edmund out of the room, plumped up the invalid's pillows, got her into a bed-jacket, and then stood over her while, with the best will in the world, Jane-Anne did full justice to her dinner.

"What a pretty room this is, Aunt Martha," she said when she had eaten the last spoonful of pudding. "What is it makes it so pretty?"

"The things in it is all good," Mrs. Dew replied, "all old and good; not at all what's suited to a servant's bedroom, if you ask me. But they was here when I came, an', of course, it isn't for me to find fault. The other things has come, and I've got them arranged, but the carpet couldn't be nailed down for fear of waking you. They look very different in a good-sized room to what they did in Jeune Street, I can tell you. I'm very pleased to see my own things what I'm used to. You shall have this room, Jane-Anne, while you're here. I'll move my clothes to-morrow and put yours in. If it isn't Master Edmund again, and

Master Montagu with 'im—I never knew such perseverin' young varmints, an' the times I've sent them away. One'd think you was some sort of a exhibition, that one would. Yes, sirs, you may come in, but you mustn't stop long. One'd think as you'd never seen a sick person before, an' me not had time so much as to wash her face before you was back again. What! Mr. Wycherly wants to come and see her after tea? Well, it's a great honour, and very kind on his part after going yesterday and all."

This time the interview was brief and unsatisfactory, for Mrs. Dew remained in the room and Montagu, in consequence, was absolutely dumb, while Jane-Anne was too nervous to do more than mumble negatives or affirmatives to the innumerable questions asked by the quite unembarrassed Edmund.

After five minutes of it the boys departed of their own accord.

Jane-Anne slept again from lunch till tea time, and after tea Mr. Wycherly came to see her.

This time Mrs. Dew did not remain. She set a chair for him and left them. Jane-Anne was sitting up in bed, arrayed in a white dimity jacket of Mrs. Dew's. This garment was voluminous and much too large for its wearer, so that Jane-Anne's face and hair seemed to emerge from amidst a billowy sea of dimity. Her hair was still loose and streamed over the bed. Mrs. Dew had wanted to plait it up, but Jane-Anne said the thick plaits hurt her head when she lay down, so her aunt gave way.

"You are looking better, my child," said Mr. Wycherly.

"I am better, sir; I'm nearly well, I'm afraid."

"Afraid! but surely you want to be well?"

"I should if I was going to stay here," Jane-Anne said earnestly. "Sir, do you think you could stop me going back to the Bainbridge?"

"Stop you," Mr. Wycherly repeated, much perplexed. "But I thought——"

"I'm sure," Jane-Anne interrupted eagerly, "if it's to learn to be a servant that I've got to go back Aunt could teach me just as well—better, I think. She can do everything they do there, and do it nicer than the people that teaches us. She *is* a good servant, isn't she, sir?"

"Your aunt is a quite admirable person," Mr. Wycherly said, gravely, "and most accomplished in every household art; but from what she told me I gathered that this school is a very good one, and that it was a great help to her to have got you into it."

Jane-Anne's eager face blanched. "Please, sir," she whispered, "if I promise to eat very little and work very hard would you let me stay with you and aunt?" She clasped her hands and leant forward, devouring Mr. Wycherly's face with her great tragic eyes. "Aunt would be very angry if she knew I'd spoken to you; but you could stop me going if you liked, and if I go back I shall die, I know I shall."

"What is it you dislike so much?" Mr. Wycherly asked.

"All of it, except the lessons, they are lovelly.

I can't seem to do it; my back aches so, and it's so cold."

"But it won't be cold this time. Summer is almost here."

"It isn't the weather, it's my heart," cried Jane-Anne; "it's that that's so cold. Nobody cares much about me, they think me odd and funny. Do you think me odd and funny, sir?"

Mr. Wycherly certainly did, but he laid one of his beautiful old hands on Jane-Anne's, saying gently, "I think that as yet you are not very strong, and I am quite sure that it is bad for you to worry about going back. You can't possibly go back for another fortnight, your aunt said so, and—who knows——?"

Mr. Wycherly had not intended to say this last at all. It was most unwise and misleading, but the brown eyes held his and compelled him to give them comfort. He tried to patch up his mistake by saying, in a matter of fact tone: "Suppose Montagu or Edmund begged me not to send him back to school, what should I do? Because, you see, I know that school is the best place for them—though for me the sun sets and never rises till they come back. We all have to do things we don't like."

"But they like school—they told me so."

"You probably would like it, too, if you made up your mind to do so."

"I've tried so hard, sir. I really have. Your young gentlemen don't have to wear horrid clothes at their school; you don't know how dismal it is. I believe if I might live here with you and aunt

I'd never have the creppits any more; I'd be so warm and happy in my heart."

"Well, you must keep on being warm and happy, and get strong and merry—and then—we'll see what can be done."

Oh, weak, soft-hearted Mr. Wycherly! Against his will, against his better judgment, the words slipped out.

Jane-Anne, white but radiant, lay back exhausted on her pillows. Mr. Wycherly stood up to go. "Promise me," he said, "that you won't worry, that you will eat and sleep as much as you can, that you will do everything that your good aunt and the doctor bid you, and that you will try to be happy and at home."

Jane-Anne sat forward again. "Mr. Wycherly sir," she said breathlessly, "you won't forget, you will try and make aunt keep me. Oh, I have cried and cried, and prayed and prayed, and I don't think God can expect much more of a little girl like me, do you?"

"Crying is absolutely forbidden. You must promise me that you won't cry any more."

"I promise," she said meekly, and lay back on her pillows again. "But you, too; you won't forget?"

"I certainly shall not forget. Now I must really go."

He had reached the door, when an imperative cry from the bed stopped him.

"You haven't said it."

"Said what?" and Mr. Wycherly trembled lest she should force him to swear then and there that she should not go back to the Bainbridge.

"What you said yesterday afternoon. Please say it, and then perhaps He will."

"God bless you, my child," Mr. Wycherly mumbled, much embarrassed.

As he made his way through the housekeeper's room to his own part of the house he reflected that Mrs. Dew was certainly right when she described her niece as "making a stir." She had assuredly stirred his heart to a quite painful extent. He was moved and perturbed and puzzled as he had not been for many a long day, and through all his pondering there sounded Sterne's words to the imprisoned starling: "*God help thee—but I'll let thee out, cost what it will.*"

CHAPTER IX

THE QUEST

" My voice shall with thy future visions blend,
And reach into thy heart, when mine is cold,
A token and a tone. . . ."

CHILDE HAROLD.

NEXT day Jane-Anne was allowed to sit in the garden under the apple-tree: a queer little hunched-up figure in the tight stuff-dress and a shawl. She also wore the pie-dish, for Mrs. Dew was one of those people who considered it almost disreputable to be out of doors bare-headed.

She sat in a basket-chair and on her knees lay her most recent prize, " Home Influence," a fat handsome volume bound in purple cloth with gilt edges. For lessons, Jane-Anne had won every prize open to her at the asylum. Although she had only been there a year, and that year constantly broken by long bouts of illness, she had gained seven books. These, which included a Bible, a prayer-book, and church hymnal, with one other, comprised her whole library. The prizes were all of a moral and edifying character, and Jane-Anne had read them over and over again hungrily, with the passionate interest and enthusiasm which she brought to everything outside her actual daily duties. And although

she whole-heartedly admired them she was yet subconsciously critical and unsatisfied. She regarded her prizes with the greatest respect. Familiarity had, so far, bred no contempt for them in her mind, but all the time she felt that there was something lacking. Although they were the only books she possessed, they were not the only ones she had read. In the previous autumn, her mother's mistress, Lady Dursley, had commanded her aunt to take the child for a change to their place in Gloucestershire, accompanying the order with a liberal cheque for travelling expenses. The family was in Scotland and most of the big house shut up, and nearly all the servants were making holiday, except the housekeeper, an old friend of Mrs. Dew, and one elderly kitchen-maid. But the great library was open, for a young man had been sent down to catalogue the books. He was an intelligent young man and took a fancy to Jane-Anne and had her with him a great deal. He found her books he thought good for her, and on departure presented her with the little green-covered "Children's Treasury," compiled by Palgrave.

In this Jane-Anne read constantly and carefully, not because she was particularly attracted by the poems, though some of them she loved and learned by heart, but because whenever she came across any poetry she searched through it eagerly in the hope of finding a poem her father used to repeat to her. She had read and re-read the little green book unceasingly, but nowhere could she find her poem

Her father died before she was five years old, but Jane-Anne's recollection of him was curiously vivid, and at this very moment her mind strove to materialise a memory elusive in some ways as a puff of smoke, sharp and defined in others as a tongue of leaping flame against a midnight sky.

The moment Mrs. Dew had safely disappeared into the house the child dragged off the pie-dish and cast it violently on the grass at her feet. Then she lay back in her chair, her eyes dreamy and pensive, though ever and again she knit her black eyebrows in her effort to remember.

Her thin hands lay folded above the unopened volume on her knees and she sat very still.

It was warm and pleasant in Mr. Wycherly's garden; a thrush sang in the boughs above her head, and every now and then pink and white petals dropped softly upon her hair. A flutter of wind blew over a great clump of narcissus, bearing their perfume on its wings, and the heavy scent was memory-laden for Jane-Anne.

She saw a long, low-ceiled, lamp-lit room with a window at either end and all the furniture ranged round the walls that a free path might be open for the restless pacing up and down of one who was never too busy or too absorbed to be at the beck and call of an often fretful little girl. As in a vision she beheld that man "with all his keen worn look and Grecian grace" tramping to and fro and holding in his arms a tired, fidgetty child who could not sleep.

Backwards and forwards he went, and with the soothing movement was the sound of words

sorrowful and majestic, musical in their rhythmic swing and balance: words that poor Jane-Anne could never remember, though she felt that they were there written indelibly on mind and heart, but covered, covered deeply with layer upon layer of fugitive things of little worth. Some day, she was convinced, she would find that poetry and with it a thousand things about her father that she had forgotten. He often wore a narcissus in his buttŏn-hole, and as her head lay on his shoulder the crushed flower gave forth a double fragrance.

It was this familiar scent, strong in the warm old Oxford garden, that seemed to compass her about in an atmosphere of memories, memories of a time when she, too, was always warm, cared about, schemed for, enwheel'd around with love on every hand.

The lines between the black eyebrows were smoothed out as by a tender hand. The unremembered poem ceased to worry her. She would find it some day. Meanwhile, she was sure her daddy knew she loved him. There was something he had told her to remember and she had forgotten, but only for a little while. It would come back, she was sure it would come back. Here, in this house, where there were so many books, perhaps she would find it.

She saw again her beautiful, gentle mother, so calm always and patient. Mrs. Dew was careful to impress upon Jane-Anne that she in no way resembled her mother, and the child never resented this reproach, for had not that very mother

rejoiced in her likeness to her father? "My little Maid of Athens," had been her mother's name for Jane-Anne, and Jane-Anne treasured it in her mind. She knew that her worthy aunt had never either liked or approved of her father, and this only made her more passionately loyal to his memory. She pondered these things in her heart, puzzled and pained sometimes, but never daunted in her pride. It was from no mean country that her father had come, she was sure of that. She knew little enough of Greece, nothing of its great history, but chance phrases that she had heard in infancy remained in her mind. She was sure that there was something to know, something worth knowing, and that she would know it some day.

She never spoke of her parents to her companions at the asylum; and although Mrs. Dew would often talk fondly and proudly of her mother, and Jane-Anne loved her for it, her aunt's silence with regard to the father she adored filled the child with a resentment none the less bitter that it never found expression. Jane-Anne was perfectly aware of her hostile attitude, although Mrs. Dew was careful never to say one word in disparagement of a man she had been quite unable to understand; whom she had heartily disliked.

"I wonder why I'm thinking so much of my daddie since I came here?" Jane-Anne thought to herself. "I suppose it's because I'm happier."

Presently, over the grass towards her came Montagu, very long in the leg and short in the sleeve. Edmund was out zestfully finding his

way about Oxford in his recently discovered fashion.

Montagu sat down on the grass at Jane-Anne's feet and looked up at her, smiling broadly, but never a word said he till he espied the book in her lap.

"What's that?" he asked.

"One of my prizes, sir," Jane-Anne answered primly.

"Is it decent?"

"It's most interesting."

"Can I look at it?"

The book changed hands and Montagu began to read. He turned the pages very fast, to the wonderment of Jane-Anne, who had never seen people read after this fashion.

He was lying face-downwards on the grass in front of her, and she watched his eyes as they swept the page from top to bottom in, apparently, one glance. She liked his thin brown face with the large kind eyes and firm capable mouth that was always shut when he wasn't talking, but just at that moment she thought that his expression was less pleasant than usual, that there was something scornful and almost sinister about his mouth, and yet she was sure that in some queer way he was amused. Why?

Jane-Anne had never found anything in the least amusing in the work in question; interesting, certainly; "touching" (the lady who gave them Sunday lessons at the asylum was fond of the word "touching") frequently; but humorous never. The authorities who chose books for

female orphans at the Bainbridge did not consider the cultivation of a sense of humour in any way a necessary part of the training.

Presently Montagu began to dip into the book here and there, still reading with that lightning-like rapidity that so astonished Jane-Anne.

In five minutes he shut it with a slam and looked up at her and laughed.

"What awful rot," he remarked genially, as though certain of sympathy.

Jane-Anne gazed at him in consternation. "Rot?" she faltered.

"Fearful squish; you don't mean to say you really like it."

"I don't know what you mean," she said, so offended that she quite forgot the respectful 'sir.'"

"It's so stilted and bombastic and unnatural. The style"—here Montagu unconsciously gave a perfect imitation of his house master's manner—"is so cheap and meretricious."

"I don't understand about style in books," said Jane-Anne, still much umbraged. "D'you mean the binding?"

"Good gracious, no. I mean the way it's written. Listen to this"—and Montagu opened the book haphazard and read the following extract aloud:—"'He had been minister of a favourite church in one of the southern towns, and master of an establishment for youths of high rank, in both which capacities he had given universal satisfaction. The reprehensible conduct of some of his pupils, carried on at first so secretly as to

elude his knowledge, at length became so notorious as to demand examination. He had at first refused all credence, but when proved by the confused replies of all, and half-confession of some, he briefly and emphatically laid before them the enormity of their conduct, and declared, that as confidence was entirely broken between them, he would resign the honour of their education, refusing to admit them any longer as members of his establishment.' There!" Montagu exclaimed, "could you have anything worse?"

"I think it's all said very properly and grandly," Jane-Anne protested. "I don't see what's the matter with it at all."

Montagu rolled over on the grass and sat up. "It's the grandness that's so detestable."

"It's my best prize," she said indignantly.

"I'm sorry," said Montagu, seeing that she was really hurt, "but you ask Guardie about that sort of writing."

"It's printed," snapped Jane-Anne.

Montagu gazed at her in hopeless bewilderment. He had never before argued with a girl.

Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes filled with angry tears. She clenched her thin little hands and bit her lips to keep from bursting into sobs.

"I say," Montagu exclaimed, with real contrition, "why do you mind? What does it matter what I think?"

"If you," Jane-Anne gasped, "had as few books as me, and loved them every one dearly, and then someone came along and abused them and called

them 'rot' and 'merry something' and 'squish,' *you* wouldn't like it."

This time the big tears escaped, rolled over and down her cheeks, dropping with a splash on to the plaid shawl covering her knees.

And at this critical moment Mr. Wycherly came out of the house and across the grass towards them. He had seen the children from his study window, and remembering that the boys went back to school next day, decided to seek their society under the pleasant shade of the apple-tree.

Montagu stalked over to the tool house to fetch a chair for his guardian and arrived with it as Mr. Wycherly reached the apple-tree. Jane-Anne had lost her handkerchief, the tears were shining on her cheeks, and she gave a most unmistakable sniff just as Mr. Wycherly reached them. But she stood up and curtsied with down-cast eyes and burning cheeks, and at the same moment Montagu came back bearing a chair for his guardian.

"What is the matter?" asked Mr. Wycherly.

Jane-Anne continued to stand, and lifted her tear-washed eyes to his face. Had it been stern or severe she could never have answered a word; as it was, she said quite simply: "He didn't like my prize and I minded."

Mr. Wycherly sat down in the chair Montagu had brought and looked from the pained and indignant Jane-Anne to the evidently puzzled and distressed Montagu.

"Suppose we all sit down and try to come to a better understanding," he said.

Jane-Anne sank heavily into her chair. She was still weak, and even the little effort to greet Mr. Wycherly with due respect caused her legs to quake and her heart to beat thunderously in her ears.

She leant her head against the back of the chair and looked so white that for a moment Mr. Wycherly thought she was about to faint. But she did nothing of the kind.

Instead, she said in a voice that wholly belied her exhausted appearance: "Have *you* read 'Home Influence,' sir?"

"I don't think so," said Mr. Wycherly; "is that the name of the book under discussion?"

Jane-Anne held it out towards him; he took it from her carefully, placed his eye-glasses on his nose, opened it haphazard, and began to read.

Precisely the same thing happened as with Montagu. His eyes sought a page and he turned it. This extraordinary way of reading was not peculiar to Montagu, that was evident. But in Mr. Wycherly's face neither scorn nor amusement was portrayed, only a polite interest.

In three minutes Montagu said, "Well?"

Mr. Wycherly closed the book. "I cannot," he said, "be expected to express an opinion after so cursory a glance at the contents. Montagu, go and ask Mrs. Dew for a glass of milk; this child looks faint; bring some biscuits, too."

Montagu sped away, and he turned to Jane-Anne.

"You mustn't mind him," he said, kindly. "Clever Winchester boys are always intolerant

—while they are boys. Montagu reads a great deal more than he can digest, and people with indigestion are proverbially cantankerous."

Jane-Anne didn't understand what he meant in the very least, but she felt immediately and immensely comforted. So much so, that she was impelled to speak to Mr. Wycherly of her thoughts when she first came out.

"Please, sir," she said, calmly dismissing the merits or demerits of "Home Influence" that seemed so vital a moment ago. "Do you know a piece of poetry about mountains?"

"A great deal of poetry has been written about mountains," Mr. Wycherly replied cautiously.

"It's a piece of poetry I want to find," said Jane-Anne, "that I heard many times long ago, and I can't remember anything about it except that there was mountains. I thought perhaps you'd know it."

Here Montagu appeared with a glass of milk and some biscuits. The milk had slopped over on to the biscuits "in some unaccountable way," he explained; but their sopped condition did not spoil them for Jane-Anne, who munched quite happily and smiled her broad ecstatic smile at him to show that she had forgiven his cruel remarks about "Home Influence."

Presently the doctor came to see her, and Mrs. Dew fetched her in to be sounded.

The moment she had gone Montagu turned upon his guardian, demanding sternly: "Well, isn't it hopeless squish?"

"It is her prize," said Mr. Wycherly gently.

"Why, that's just what she said," Montagu exclaimed in astonishment at his usually logical guardian taking this line.

"You will find," said Mr. Wycherly, "as you go through life that it is never safe to abuse things violently before you have realised your hearer's point of view. You may offend deeply."

"You'd have to be jolly dishonest to always think of that," Montagu answered indignantly.

"You will be jolly rude and disagreeable if you never think of it," Mr. Wycherly retorted. "Besides, did she ask you for your opinion?"

"Well, no—but it seemed such a pity to go on liking such stuff. People must begin to learn what's good and what's bad some time—and I shouldn't think she's stupid."

"I am quite sure she is not stupid, and I am equally sure that she is painfully sensitive and that you were more than a little stupid not to see it."

"Me, stupid!" Montagu repeated in surprise. "No one has ever called me that before."

Mr. Wycherly chuckled. "I thought," said he, "that the presence of a young girl among us would be mentally stimulating. She has not been in the house two days, and yet, you see, already she has suggested to you new possibilities in yourself. By the way—just make a note of any poems you can think of bearing on mountains."

"Why, there are thousands," cried Montagu, aghast.

"Sure to be in Wordsworth," said Mr. Wycherly "Anyway, we'll mark the places."

CHAPTER X

FORTUNE'S WHEEL

"But that's all shove be'ind me
Long ago and fur away."

RUDYARD KIPLING.

THE boys had been back at school a fortnight. Jane-Anne was quite convalescent and got up to breakfast, but the date of her return to the Bainbridge was still undecided.

The doctor came at longer intervals, but every time he came he still declared that there was "a roughness" in Jane-Anne's lung, and that it would be madness to send her North until that roughness was smoothed away.

Night and morning and many times during the day, Jane-Anne bombarded heaven with petitions that "the roughness" might perhaps increase a very little, since it gave her no inconvenience whatever; anyway, that it might remain sufficiently rasping to confirm the doctor in his view that her return to the Bainbridge was at present out of the question.

Mrs. Dew, although properly respectful to the doctor as a friend of Mrs. Methuen, yet felt that in this case he pushed professional caution to the verge of the ridiculous. Here was Jane-Anne

eating and sleeping as well as could be, with pinker and plumper cheeks than she had had for many a long day, looking, in fact, as her aunt said, "the picture of health," though some people might have thought the picture rather elusive and misleading; here was Jane-Anne eating the bread of idleness with almost aggressive satisfaction in Holywell when she ought to have been reaping the benefits of her "nomination" up in Northumberland.

Why all this fuss about a slight roughness? "Mark my words and anyone can 'ear anything as he listens for," said Mrs. Dew.

Finally, Mr. Wycherly interviewed the doctor, who said to him in plain words what he had feared to say to the child's aunt.

The doctor was an outspoken young man of sporting tendencies. He wore a white hat rather on one side and drove an uncommonly good horse, and to Mr. Wycherly he said: "It's like setting a thoroughbred filly to pull a cartload of bricks to expect that child to do housework in her present state. She ought to do nothing for three months, and even then I should say she is singularly unfitted for the kind of life she has up there. I know those schools—excellent for big strong girls; but that child isn't strong. She's all nerves and brains and empty, craving heart. The lung trouble isn't serious if it's checked in time, but if she goes back she'll get overtired and catch cold again directly. I'm sorry for her aunt, but what can I say? I won't be responsible for sending her back."

The doctor spoke angrily. He hated interfering in other people's business, and he thought it exceedingly probable that an old gentleman living by himself might strongly object to having a girl child foisted upon him for an indefinite period.

"It seems to me," said Mr. Wycherly mildly, "that it would be criminal stupidity to allow her to go back."

The doctor looked rather astonished.

"But what's to become of the child?" he asked.

"Surely there is nothing to prevent her remaining here with her aunt, and when she is strong enough are there not good schools in Oxford?"

The doctor picked up his white hat. "Of course," he said, "if you have no objection to her remaining here the whole thing is perfectly simple, but I understood from her aunt that the arrangement was the child was only to be here in her holidays, and she seemed sadly afraid of trespassing upon your good nature in keeping her here so long as it is. She's a very decent honest woman, but——"

Mr. Wycherly rose and rang the bell to summon Mrs. Dew.

And the end of it all was that somebody wrote to Lord Dursley. Jane-Anne's "nomination" at the Bainbridge was presented to a girl whose physique was more deserving, and his lordship, instead of being annoyed, as Mrs. Dew had feared, at Jane-Anne's failure to benefit from his good intentions on her behalf, declared himself quite

ready to pay for her "schooling" in Oxford whenever that fidgetty fellow, the doctor, should consider her able for instruction.

"Not till the autumn," said the doctor, to Mrs. Dew. "She can help you till then, *you* won't overwork her, I'm sure."

Jane-Anne knew perfectly well that her fate hung in the balance when the doctor sought his interview with Mr. Wycherly, and when the result of that interview was imparted to her rather grudgingly, and with many injunctions as to decorous conduct, by her aunt, she felt such a passionate love and gratitude towards the gentle-mannered master who had made this beatific state of things possible that she could not rest that night without going to thank him.

Therefore, without consulting her aunt, she sought his study after dinner and knocked timidly at the door.

Mr. Wycherly was, as usual, seated at his desk writing; the shaded light was pulled low over his papers, making a little pool of brightness in the grey dusk of the room. The big window was wide open and a scent of wallflowers was wafted in from the garden below.

"Come in, my child, come in," said the kind, welcoming voice as he saw the timid figure at the door.

And Jane-Anne came in with a nervous rush, but she did not forget to shut the door behind her.

She dropped on her knees beside him and seized his hand, kissing it passionately, much to his confusion. He was quite unaccustomed to violent

manifestations of feeling, and his long residence in Scotland had increased his natural reserve.

"I know it's you who managed that I shouldn't go back, and I do want so to thank you. You don't know what I feel like. Please, sir, I will try to be useful. Anything you would like me to do——"

Very gently Mr. Wycherly withdrew his hand. "Suppose you sit on a chair," he suggested, "and we will have a chat together."

With stately courtesy, he placed a chair for Jane-Anne, and, seated again in his own revolving-chair, turned to face her.

As always, when much moved, she was very white, and to-night her great eyes were soft and dog-like in their devotion.

"By the way," said Mr. Wycherly, "I haven't forgotten your inquiry about the poem that you cannot remember, and I have marked in a volume of Wordsworth a number of verses dealing with mountains. Perhaps you would like to look through it at your leisure."

"Thank you, sir," Jane-Anne whispered.

"I know nothing," Mr. Wycherly continued, "more annoying than a half-remembered quotation. I sincerely hope that you will soon find it."

For a moment there was silence, then:

"Sir," Jane-Anne said earnestly, "are you very lonely now the young gentlemen have gone back to school?"

"I do miss them greatly, of course."

"Do you remember, sir, when you came to see me, when I was in bed the first day I was here,

you said when they went back that the sun set for you——"

"Did I?" said Mr. Wycherly, rather surprised at himself.

"You really did, sir, and I wondered whether —though the sun has set—whether you'd let me try—to be a little tiny star—just so you wouldn't feel quite so lonely."

Mr. Wycherly's hand still tingled with the touch of those soft unaccustomed girlish lips, nevertheless he held it out to her, saying, "That will be very kind of you."

Jane-Anne placed her own within it and she did not attempt to kiss Mr. Wycherly's hand again, but she looked at him as though she would read his very soul and asked: "Sir, have you ever heard anything about a place called Greece?"

Mr. Wycherly laughed. "For a considerable portion of my life," he replied, "I have heard about little else."

"Will you tell me things sometimes, sir? Will you?"

"I shall be most happy," said Mr. Wycherly. "You certainly ought to know as much as possible about your father's country—and there is so much to know."

"I have another name," she said suddenly and with apparent irrelevance. "Shall I tell it you? Very few people know."

"Do you mean Stavrides?" Mr. Wycherly asked.

"No, sir, not that; I have another Christian name. Allegra; don't you think it's very pretty?"

"Very," said Mr. Wycherly; "it is a beautiful name, but it isn't Greek."

"I'm called after somebody's daughter that died. I don't know who she was; mother knew. My daddie liked the name. I daresay I shall find out some day all about her."

"I daresay you will," said Mr. Wycherly, and looked hard at Jane-Anne.

"Which would you like to call me?" she asked.

"I shall call you Jane-Anne, not Allegra," Mr. Wycherly said decidedly.

"It's a pretty name," she said wistfully.

"It has rather sad associations for me," he added.

The clock upon the mantelpiece struck nine. Jane-Anne rose. "I must go, sir, now; good night, and thank you."

"Good night, my child. Get strong and rest you merry. And here is the Wordsworth; tell me when you find your poem."

She took from him a large brown volume that bristled with inserted slips of paper. He crossed the room and opened the door for her, and Jane-Anne went out with her head held high. "Just like he did for Mrs. Methuen," she reflected ecstatically.

When she had gone Mr. Wycherly went and stood at the window and looked out into the night. The sky was unclouded, of a deep, soft, soothing blue, and right in a line with his window shone one star.

"I wonder," he pondered, "what made him call her after Byron's daughter."

When Jane-Anne reached the kitchen, proudly bearing her volume of Wordsworth, she found her aunt sitting at the newly-scrubbed kitchen table darning a stocking.

"What made you stop so long for?" Mrs. Dew inquired tartly, "hindering and worritin' the master. It don't take half an hour to say 'thank you, and my duty to you.'"

"The master set a chair for me and talked to *me*," Jane-Anne replied gloriously, "and when I came away he opened the door for me, just like he did for Mrs. Methuen when she came the other day, and he's lent me a great big poetry book. Look at it! Oh, aunt, I do believe the Almighty must be just like Mr. Wycherly."

Mrs. Dew nearly dropped her stocking. "Jane-Anne!" she exclaimed in tones of horrified amazement, "how you can stand there and say such things passes me. Go to bed this minute, you inyuman child. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, that you ought."

"But, aunt," Jane-Anne expostulated, "Miss Stukely, the lady that taught us Sundays, she said we must love God, be always loving Him, and always talking about Him; we couldn't think and talk too much about Him; the more we did it the fitter we'd be for heaven, and I've never seen anybody before as I'd like Him to be like—so where's the harm?"

The child spoke with breathless earnestness.

Mrs. Dew stared at her, intensely disapproving.

"How you can stand there," she repeated, "how you can have the face to stand there and

talk about the Almighty bein' *like* anybody, just as if He was your next door neighbour, turns me cold. Where's your respect? Where's your sense of decency? I'll have none of your revival ways here, I can tell you! Quiet, respectable church I've always been, with none of such goin's on. It's quite enough for most of us to do our duty in that station of life without talking familiarly of lovin' and such. *Go* to bed, I tell you, and let me hear no more of such fandanglements, and I'll come in ten minutes to fetch your candle and bring you that hot milk as is all over skin you've been so long. Now bustle about smartish."

Jane-Anne bustled.

Mrs. Dew leant back in her chair as one quite unable to cope with the force of circumstances.

"My stars! Good fathers!" exclaimed Mrs. Dew. "If that's the sort of thing they teaches at the Bainbridge it's more than time my niece was took away."

Very early next morning Jane-Anne crept out of bed, pulled up her blind, and seized the volume of poetry Mr. Wycherly had lent her. She read till her eyes ached and her head swam; she read without the smallest understanding or enjoyment, but with the greatest care and application, and though there was much about mountains there was nothing that struck the faintest chord of memory in Jane-Anne. Whatever it was that her father had repeated when he used to carry her about, it wasn't there. And yet she was

certain about "the mountains." Yes, it was "the mountains."

"I'm afraid he'll have to look again," she said to herself. She had not the smallest doubt that Mr. Wycherly would help her.

It was a very hot May, and as the doctor had said she could not be too much in the fresh air, her aunt, that afternoon, put a little table and chair for her under the apple-tree, gave her some needlework, and bidding her listen for any bell that might happen to ring, announced her intention of going out to do some household shopping. "Unless anyone calls to see the master it's unlikely that anyone'll come at all," said Mrs. Dew, "and the front door bell's that loud you'll hear it right enough if so be as you don't get moonin'. I shan't be more than a hour."

Shortly after Mrs. Dew's departure Mr. Wycherly came to his window and looked out.

There sat Jane-Anne at the little table covered by a heap of white sewing, and he thought what a pleasant picture she made in her stiff buff frock, so maidenly and sweet, so suitably and sensibly employed on this sunny afternoon in the midst of the green old garden, gay with tulips and fragrant wallflowers.

Suddenly Jane-Anne stooped down and took off her heavy shoes and there and then flung them one after another to the other side of the lawn. Then she removed her stockings. Mr. Wycherly gazed fascinated. What was the child about?

This was soon deplorably evident.

Jane-Anne was taking off her dress.

Mr. Wycherly felt that he ought to go away from that window, but he didn't. He stayed where he was, and what's more, he placed his eyeglasses upon his nose.

She gave herself a complicated kind of shake and the buff abomination fell about her feet in stiff expostulating folds.

Daintily and deliberately, she stepped out of it as though withdrawing her feet from something dirty and distasteful. She wore a skimpy little blue-and-white striped petticoat of cotton ; body and skirt in one piece, it reached just to her knees, but was sleeveless, and her long, slender arms were bare.

A thrush was singing in the apple-tree and a blackbird warbled loudly in a lilac bush trying to drown the thrush. They sang as though there were no such thing as winter in the world, and neither of them cared a whit for Jane-Anne and her disrobings.

Flinging her white arms above her head, she danced into the middle of the lawn on slim, twinkling white feet and continued to dance all over it with the greatest abandon and enjoyment, while her long black plaits bumped joyously. So light of foot, so variously graceful in her gracious suppleness, with such divine gravity and dainty decorum that Mr. Wycherly watching was fain to take his glasses off and wipe them, for suddenly he could not see as clearly as he wished. Her radiant face was pale, but her wide eyes were full of a gladness that seemed to mirror back the brightness of that May afternoon, and the little

petticoat was like the sheath of a flower enfolding and displaying all this happy grace.

Loudly carolled the blackbird, lustily chirruped the thrush, and Jane-Anne danced to their orchestra, and while she danced her mind kept saying: "I've done with it, I've done with it. I shall never go back. Life is before me, a new life; a life full of wonders, and a bedroom to myself, with furniture like looking-glasses; a life with a kind, sensible, if worldly-minded aunt, who gives to little girls delicious puddings that they like. A life with books in it, big books; not interesting, perhaps, but very grand and splendid to have lent one. A life that is to be lived under the same roof with a beautiful, kind old gentleman who will, perhaps, by-and-bye let me wait upon him. Oh, wonderful and delicious prospect, to wait upon Mr. Wycherly! To hand him his plate and to pour out—what should she pour out? Wine, she expected, though Miss Stukely said wine was wrong. Not, perhaps, for the gentry, for the *real* gentry, as her aunt would say. How soft and warm the grass to the bare tripping feet! How kind of those birds to sing like that! How lovely it was to be young and light and to have got rid of heavy shoes and hot, uncomfortable frock. How——"

It was the front door bell.

Jane-Anne heard it and Mr. Wycherly did not.

There certainly was the making of a quick-change artist in Jane-Anne. In a twinkling she had found her shoes and stockings and put them

on, and she ran to the house struggling into her dress as she ran.

> "You have the Pyrrhic dance as yet,
> Where has the Pyrrhic phalanx gone?"

said Mr. Wycherly, wondering why she had stopped so suddenly.

CHAPTER XI

THE CULT OF BRUEY

"The instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures."—*Poetics*, ARISTOTLE.

JANE-ANNE was a true Athenian in that she was ever ready to run after any new thing, and during her last two terms at the Bainbridge the strongest influence in her life was that of her Sunday-school teacher, Miss Stukely.

Jane-Anne whole-heartedly admired Miss Stukely, and where she admired she invariably imitated. Miss Stukely was delicate, and Jane-Anne delighted in her own "crepitations" as being the sincerest sort of flattery of that lady.

Miss Stukely was slender, always elaborately dressed, gentle in manner, with white, heavily-ringed hands. She was not, perhaps, beautiful in face, being somewhat sallow with a receding chin; but her expression was kindly, and Jane-Anne read into her face the spiritual excellencies the lady was most fond of extolling She had a way of closing her eyes when she was most earnest in exhortation that Jane-Anne found very impressive. Moreover, she frequently used a gold-

topped smelling bottle, and the possession of a similar restorative was just then Jane-Anne's most cherished aspiration.

To lean back in a chair while inhaling the vinegary fragrance of a cut-glass bottle, to lean back with closed eyes, in an aura of the faintness and exhaustion induced by strong emotion, was to Jane-Anne as the ecstatic vision of a mystic: a state of mind and body only to be attained by profound spiritual exaltation.

She learned by heart with ease. She could reel off any number of appropriate, or quite as often, inappropriate texts; and did so on the smallest provocation, greatly to the indignation of Mrs. Dew, who felt that she required no religious instruction at her niece's hands.

This facility greatly impressed Miss Stukely, who felt that in Jane-Anne she indeed found fertile soil for the good seed, and there was no question whatever that Jane-Anne fully deserved the prize she gained for "Bible-searching."

This prize was the history of one "Bruey," "a little worker for Christ," whose winning personality (Miss Stukely was fond of the word "winning," generally using it in the sense of a successful gainer of souls) seized upon Jane-Anne's imagination till she lived and walked and had her being in that character.

Bruey was just her own age, had "great dark eyes" (Jane-Anne was pleasantly conscious of possessing similar orbs), had palpitations. Jane-Anne couldn't quite achieve these, but felt that crepitations were nearly as good, and that she was,

at all events, near the rose, if not the royal flower herself.

Bruey had no father (another resemblance) and a mother, who, though an industrious church-worker, was perhaps not quite as understanding and sympathetic as she might have been. Put Mrs. Dew in place of the mother and there you are!

Bruey always read her Bible seated upon a box in her bedroom window, "a folded rug upon this box made it soft and comfortable for a seat." Here she studied the scriptures and said her prayers, watching the sunset the while. She always kept a pencil by her and marked the texts she found most helpful, and Jane-Anne's Bible already was scored heavily in hundreds of places. Its newness (being a prize) was rather afflicting, so she wetted her thumb and doubled down the corners to hasten its look of age and constant use.

The box and the window were denied to Jane-Anne at the Bainbridge, for twelve girls slept in a dormitory where the ledges of the windows were five feet from the ground, and no box of any sort was permitted in an apartment of almost superhuman neatness.

At Jeune Street, too, the room was so small that the window was blocked up by a chest of drawers far too heavy for Jane-Anne to move.

But the moment she came to Holywell she perceived glorious possibilities of Bruey-ness in the fine big bedroom her aunt had given up to her. It is true that the dressing-table stood in

the window, but it was an old-fashioned, spindle-legged affair with swing looking-glass attached, quite light and easy to move, and the moment that Jane-Anne could get about without assistance she pulled it back into the room, dragged her empty tin box under the window, and having no shawl, folded her dressing-gown on the top to make it "soft and comfortable for a seat."

As a matter of fact it did nothing of the kind, the box was dinted and lumpy and very hard, but what cared Jane-Anne? Bruey's box was covered with chintz, but that, she felt, was a very minor detail. The main properties were all there —box, window, Bible, little girl.

That the window did not face towards the west was disappointing; that very little sky was to be seen owing to the presence of a tall house just across the yard was rather annoying. Still, there was the box and there was the window, and there was Jane-Anne, ready to throw herself into the part of Bruey with the utmost abandon.

She even improved upon Bruey, grafting on to the character certain attributes of Miss Stukely.

That morning, Mrs. Dew had turned out the kitchen cupboard, and among discarded bottles and boxes Jane-Anne had found a tiny phial that had contained vanilla essence. This she secretly pocketed. She tore a piece off her sponge, thrust it into the little bottle and then hied her to the bath-room where there was some Scrubbs' Ammonia. In a trice the bits of sponge in the bottle were saturated with that pungent fluid. Behold Jane-Anne equipped with a smelling

bottle, quite as efficacious if not so handsome as Miss Stukely's.

She sought her bower at seven o'clock, while her aunt was safely engaged in the final preparations for Mr. Wycherly's dinner. She had no time for reading and meditation at bed-time, for Mrs. Dew always came to take away the candle. Her aunt mistrusted Jane-Anne ever since she had set her hair on fire one evening in Jeune Street. When she reached her room she found that her box had been put back in the corner and her dressing-gown was hanging behind the door. This constantly happened.

Jane-Anne muttered something that sounded like "interfering old thing" and hastened to arrange it all again. This didn't take long, and once the stage was set she mounted the box, and gazed out into the uninspiring stone-cutter's yard with a suitable expression of "winning tenderness." Next she closed her eyes wearily and distantly inhaled the Scrubbs' Ammonia in the vanilla bottle. It restored her and she opened her Bible haphazard with a sanctimonious Jack-Horner sort of expression on her thin, eager little face.

She opened at the book of Job.

Now this was unexplored country. Genesis she knew; Kings and Chronicles, and the greater part of the New Testament she had read. But somehow the book of Job hadn't entered into Miss Stukely's scheme of salvation, and Jane-Anne's only acquaintance with Job so far had been in her aunt's phrase, "you'd try the patience of Job," and she had vaguely pictured

him as a meek old gentleman tormented by a large family of unruly children.

Montagu and Mr. Wycherly had dipped into "Home Influence" anywhere. This was a new way of reading to her, and she felt she must at once do likewise. So into the end of the book of Job she thrust and started at the words, "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades or loose the bonds of Orion," and read on aloud.

Now, there was in Jane-Anne a fine feeling for the beautiful, and she liked the sound of it greatly, her voice growing stronger and more impressive as she read. Especially was she carried away by the description of the horse: "*He paweth in the valley and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men. . . . He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting.*"

By this time, quite unconsciously, she had raised her voice very considerably, and she stopped in great confusion as her aunt bounced into the room demanding anxiously: "What ever *is* the matter? Who're you a-calling out to?"

"I'm only reading to myself," Jane-Anne mumbled.

"Well, I wish you'd read a bit quieter," said Mrs. Dew, "frightening a body to death with 'ha-ha-in's' and sech. An' what are you doin' sitting on that there box as I put away this very

afternoon? Why can't you leave it be in the corner?"

Jane-Anne made no reply. It is disconcerting to be snatched suddenly from all the exciting panoply of a battle-field to a mere discussion as to the position of boxes. She felt bewildered and unreal.

"Why don't you answer me?" Mrs. Dew asked impatiently.

"I was reading," Jane-Anne repeated stupidly.

"An' a very bad light to read in," said Mrs. Dew. "You come down into the kitchen an' give me a hand with the master's dinner instead of sittin' hollerin' there, and you put back that box in its proper place."

While Jane-Anne was washing up she remembered with contrition that she had not marked a single text.

In two particulars only did she feel that she could never hope to emulate Bruey. Firstly, because Bruey died in the last chapter of her palpitations. Now nothing was more opposed to Jane-Anne's aims than that she should succumb to her crepitations. Secondly, she felt that she could not hope even to approach Bruey's noble self-abnegation in the matter of hats.

Bruey at first taught her Sunday class wearing a beautiful best hat adorned with roses; but on a senior teacher pointing out that this embellishment might have a bad effect upon the morals of her infant scholars, she begged her mother to remove the offending garniture and replace it by a simple ribbon.

Never, Jane-Anne was assured, could she attain to such heights of self-denial. She never had possessed a hat with roses, but if she ever did — not all the Sunday-school teachers in creation should wrest them from her. On that point her determination was rooted. She would follow Bruey in all else but death-beds and hats. At present she felt that her hat would not excite any emotion save loathing in no matter how frivolous a breast. But if ever the day came—after all, Miss Stukely had hydrangeas in her hat—and there was no need to model herself slavishly on Bruey.

Much as she loved Mr. Wycherly, he caused her some heart-searching. She adored him. To her, he seemed to combine in his own person every kind and gracious and beautiful quality; but so far he had not said any "good words" to her except that twice he had murmured, "God bless you." Not one text had he quoted when they spake together, nor had he asked her any of those searching intimate questions as to her spiritual condition, that she found so exciting and so wonderfully easy to answer satisfactorily.

She had the true mystic's sense of nearness to the unseen; and in giving to the lonely child this feeling of fellowship with the saints, this serene confidence in Heaven's interference in her affairs, Miss Stukely and Bruey, between them, had bestowed on her a real and precious gift.

But they had also created a mental pose. They had imbued her with a sense of pious security that armed her against endeavour. What she

did easily she did well. What she disliked and found difficult she did not try to do at all, and any unpleasantness resulting from such inactivity she looked upon as a "cross." So long as she was meek and patient under rebuke; so long as she turned the other cheek to the smiter and bore no malice, she felt that she had done all that could be expected of her.

For instance, in the matter of the box, it seemed absolutely vital to her that she should read her Bible and meditate in Bruey's fashion, no matter how the constant disturbance of the said box annoyed her aunt.

As she wiped plates in a smeary and perfunctory fashion, she was rejoicing in the existence of Montagu and Edmund, because Bruey had a cousin Percy whom she influenced for good. There was a Percy, too, in "Home Influence," and like all the Percies in that class of fiction, these two were dashing, full of generous impulses, but easily led astray. Bruey's Percy even read yellow-backed novels in bed at night, and Jane wondered whether Montagu was given to similar nocturnal orgies. She had no more idea of what a yellow-back was than she had of a Roman Catholic, but she was sure that both were equally pernicious.

Edmund fitted more easily into the Percy part, he was so merry and good-looking; but fond as she was of the centre of the stage, Jane-Anne could not yet quite see herself enlightening Edmund in the approved Bruey fashion.

He was so unexpected, he would be certain to say the wrong thing.

At this moment Mrs. Dew came back from the dining-room. "You're to go and see the master in his study," she said; "it's a quarter to nine now, and the minute the clock strikes you're to come."

Jane-Anne flew to the sink to wash her hands and hastened upstairs, buttoning her sleeves as she went.

"Well, have you found the poem?" asked Mr. Wycherly.

"No, sir. I've read every one you marked, but it isn't one of them."

"Curious," Mr. Wycherly said thoughtfully; "we must try again. Sit down, my child, and think if you can remember in what sort of metre it was written, that would be a help."

But Jane-Anne knew nothing about metre, so the question of the poem lapsed for the time being.

The precious moments were fleeting, and Bruey being still in the ascendant, she asked *apropos* of nothing:

"Please, sir, do you think Master Montagu and Edmund are little workers?"

"Edmund certainly isn't," Mr. Wycherly replied decidedly; "he's an idle young dog"—here he chuckled—"but all the same he can do whatever he sets himself to do. Montagu, on the contrary, is naturally industrious. He loves knowledge for its own sake. Why do you ask?" and Mr. Wycherly looked inquiringly at Jane-Anne.

She was mystified. That anybody should call anybody else "an idle young dog" in that tone

of affectionate amusement was in itself most puzzling.

"I suppose," she said deliberately paraphrasing a favourite remark of Miss Stukely's, "we can all be workers, 'you in your small corner; I in mine.'"

"Quite so," Mr. Wycherly assented politely, though he in his turn was somewhat staggered by Jane-Anne's gently patronising tone. Had the Greek nymph of the afternoon turned into an amazing little prig in the evening? It was evident that this child was a quick-change artist in more than the matter of make-up.

As for Jane-Anne, she felt curiously flattened out. This courteous, kindly old gentleman made her feel incredibly small. Bruey, she was certain, or even the apostolic Miss Stukely herself, would find it exceedingly difficult to approach Mr. Wycherly on the subject of his soul. And then and there was lighted in the youthful mind of Jane-Anne one little candle of common-sense which illuminated this dark and difficult situation with the bright suggestion that possibly Mr. Wycherly's soul was Mr. Wycherly's business and not hers; and just at that very crucial moment she heard him saying:

"By the way, child, isn't that dress rather hot and heavy for this summer weather? Don't you think we'd better see about something else if you've not got anything thinner?"

She jumped to her feet clasping and unclasping her hands in an agony of earnestness. Where frocks were concerned souls had a poor chance with Jane-Anne.

"Oh, sir," she cried, "it's a hateful old dress, but my two cotton frocks were left at the Bainbridge and aunt said we couldn't ask for them as I'd left, and they said I could keep this and my best, as I'd got them with me, but I wish they hadn't. Mightn't some poorer child than me have this? It *is* so hideous and uncomfortable."

She had come close up to Mr. Wycherly and was pleading as though her very life depended on it.

Mr. Wycherly drew her between his knees, and there was a look of considerable amusement on his handsome old face as he asked: "If it is so ugly and so uncomfortable, why should you want to bestow it upon anybody else?"

"But it's quite good," Jane-Anne expostulated; "we couldn't throw it away. Some child might be glad of it. I'm not. Let's talk about what I shall have," she added coaxingly, and somehow she found herself sitting on Mr. Wycherly's knee.

It was years since she had sat on anybody's knee, and that she should do so again and in such circumstances seemed to her inconceivably delightful.

Jane-Anne expanded like a flower.

It did not seem such an extraordinary thing to Mr. Wycherly that a child should sit on his knee. He had served a long and somewhat severe apprenticeship to Montagu and Edmund, who both had generally elected to sit upon him at the same time. What most impressed him about Jane-Anne was that she was distressingly light.

They had a long and intimate confabulation on the subject of frocks, finally deciding that, with Mrs. Dew's permission, Mrs. Methuen should be taken into their counsels.

The clock struck nine.

Jane-Anne flung her arms round his neck and kissed him, and yet again he opened the door for her as she went out.

The following afternoon Mrs. Dew sent her out to do some messages, and while she was outside a shop—there were hats in that shop, and Jane-Anne flattened her nose against the window in her enthusiastic interest—two ladies came out to a carriage that was waiting at the kerb.

The ladies were gorgeously arrayed, evidently on their way to some party, and she turned to stare after them admiringly. The footman slammed the door, leapt upon the box, and the carriage started, when she observed that one of the ladies had dropped her purse in the gutter. It was a pretty trifle made of links of gold in the shape of a little bag. She picked it up at once and darted after the carriage, calling out to them to stop, but the ladies shook their heads at her and the coachman was far too exalted a personage to take any notice at all. The footman did just look round, but he regained his proud immobility in the next second of time.

There was a good deal of traffic that afternoon, and the carriage could not get along very fast. Jane-Anne ran after it, never letting it get out of sight, though she was breathless and tired, and

her heart thumped in her ears in a fashion that was rather too realistically reminiscent of Bruey to be altogether agreeable. She was almost giving up in despair when the carriage turned in through big gates. Faint, but pursuing, Jane-Anne followed and ran up the broad path after it. There were many gaily-dressed people standing about who stared at her, and numbers of other carriages, so that the one she followed had to go very slowly. She came up with it just as it stopped at an entrance.

The ladies saw her. "Go away, little girl," said the younger crossly; "we have nothing for you, and you have no business to follow us."

Too breathless and exhausted to speak, Jane-Anne held out the purse towards her.

"Good gracious! I must have dropped it, and you followed us; how very kind. I suppose I'd better give her something," in an aside to her companion. "I hope I've got some small change. Here you are, and thank you very much."

She selected sixpence and held it out towards Jane-Anne.

Now Jane-Anne wanted that sixpence dreadfully, for she hadn't a farthing in the world; but she had conceived a dislike for the lady; she was indignant at being taken for a beggar, and having somewhat recovered her breath, she said very distinctly:

"No, thank you; but I think you might have told the coachman to stop, then I shouldn't have had to run so far," and with her head in the air, she set off down the drive again.

A good many people had arrived at the door, and they were all listening.

She hadn't gone far when she heard quick footsteps behind her, and a short, good-tempered looking gentleman pulled her by the arm. He wore a festal white waistcoat and looked the personification of jollity. "You were quite right to refuse her beggarly sixpence, my dear," he remarked confidentially; "but it's a shame you shouldn't have something for your trouble; very good-natured of you, I call it, to run all that way. Here, you go and buy some lollipops with this!" and he held out two bright new half-crowns towards Jane-Anne.

Never had she seen so much wealth, and it was hers just for the taking; and yet she was certain she ought not to take it; that Mr. Wycherly would not like it; and already she had begun to identify herself with him.

She shook her head a little sadly. "No, thank you," she said very gently, for this time she felt the donor meant to be kind. "I mustn't, thank you," and she went on her way.

The stout gentleman looked after her and scratched his chin. "That was a nasty one," he said to the nearest passer-by. "The lass is a lady, and I offered her five bob."

Jane-Anne made her way blindly into the road. She was nearly run over three several times by carriages coming up the drive. As she turned into the open she charged into someone walking in the opposite direction, and recovering from the impact, discovered that she had run into Mr. Wycherly.

Mutual explanations followed. Mr. Wycherly was taking the daily walk he had promised Montagu to take. Jane-Anne explained her presence at the garden-party, but said nothing about the rewards offered.

Presently she found herself walking home hand in hand with Mr. Wycherly, and when they reached the house he said : " We must have more walks together, you and I, and if I forget to go out you must come and stir me up."

At tea she told her aunt about the purse, and about the money offered.

" You were quite right to refuse it," said Mrs. Dew, " an' I'm glad you had that much sense ; but what made you ?

" I thought the master wouldn't have liked it."

" The master needn't never have known nothing about it."

" But I should have known," said Jane-Anne.

CHAPTER XII

FOUND!

"And if she can have access to a good library of old and classical books, there need be no choosing at all . . . turn her loose into the old library every wet day, and let her alone . . . let her loose in the library, I say, as you do a fawn in the field. It knows the bad weeds twenty times better than you; and the good ones, too, and will eat some bitter and prickly ones, good for it, which you had not the slightest thought would have been so."—*Sesame and Lilies.*

JANE-ANNE had got her heart's desire. She was allowed to wait upon Mr. Wycherly. She laid his breakfast and carried it in. She laid his luncheon and his dinner, and her good aunt brought the heavy trays to the slab outside the dining-room door, and Jane-Anne fetched dishes one by one and set them on table or side-board, and handed vegetables and poured out Mr. Wycherly's beer for him from the old brown Toby jug that had once belonged to Admiral Bethune.

It was brought about in this wise. When Jane-Anne had been in Holywell about a month there came a letter for her one morning.

Now, that she should have a letter at all, except from her aunt, was a tremendous and most

untoward event. Yet it was undoubtedly for her, for it was addressed Miss Jane-Anne (no surname), c/o M. Wycherly, Esq., not enclosed in one of his, but stamped and sent to her direct. She found it on her plate at breakfast when she came down, and turned it over and over in her hands before she opened it.

The handwriting was small, clear and upright, and rather like Mr. Wycherly's own. She noticed this at once, as she had often taken his letters to the post for him.

"Aren't you going to open your letter?" her aunt asked.

Nervously Jane-Anne tore the envelope, flushed and paled, as she always did when excited, and then read it eagerly in absolute silence.

"Well?" Mrs. Dew demanded impatiently. "Who's been writing to you?"

"It's from Master Montagu," Jane-Anne cried breathlessly. "He's written to *me*, to ask me to see that Mr. Wycherly eats his meals—oh, aunt, you *will* let me wait on him now, won't you?"

"What's he say?" asked Mrs. Dew.

"My dear Jane-Anne," she read aloud, "I'm glad to hear from Guardie you're all right again. It would be decent of you if you'd write to me sometimes and tell me how he is, for he never says himself. And there's another thing, I wish you'd go in and out sometimes at meals and see that he isn't reading and forgetting to eat at all. That's what he does if he isn't watched, Robina told me. Just go in and joggle his elbow and remind him, if he's got a book, especially if it's

'Aeschylus'; he's very fond of that and forgets the chops and potatoes and everything. And please make him go out every day; you might take him. You see he used always to take Mause, our dog, for a walk, but she's dead, poor thing.

"You've not got much to do, with no school, so just look after Guardie like a good kid. I shall be awfully obliged, and please write.

"Yours truly,

"MONTAGU BETHUNE WYCHERLY."

"There," said Jane-Anne.

"I'll not say but what it's quite a good idea," Mrs. Dew admitted, "though you can't go jogglin' the master's elbow or any impudence of that sort. Still, you might wait on him, and if he gets reading, just go quiet and say 'potatoes, sir,' or 'peas, sir,' and it'll bring 'im back. It goes to my very heart when he forgets and leaves a homelette till it's all flat and tough, an' it'd come easier like from you—you can stop in the room at lunch and dinner, and stand be'ind him at the sideboard. And mind you don't get wool-gatherin', too, as is but likely."

"Can I have a cap and apron, like Mrs. Methuen's parlour-maid?" Jane-Anne asked eagerly, desirous to dress to the part.

"Certainly not, you'd look ridiklus. I don't want any tweeny maids in this house—you go in neat and tidy in one of the nice dresses as Mrs. Methuen got made, and behave quiet and respectful, an' if there's company—why I'll wait myself, though I don't care about it much, it not bein' what I've bin used to."

"Why couldn't I wait if there was company? I'd be very quick and quiet, and I'd love to hear the gentry talk."

"We'll see first how you waits without," said Mrs. Dew, ever dubious as to Jane-Anne's practical capacities.

So it came about that she waited on Mr. Wycherly that very day at lunch, and when she handed him the vegetables he murmured something about "tender little thumbs" which puzzled her extremely.

She was very deft and quiet, because she wanted to wait well, and whatever Jane-Anne wanted to do, that she did excellently. She had watched Mrs. Methuen's parlour-maid, and she modelled herself on that very superior young person. So quiet was she, that at first Mr. Wycherly would sometimes forget she was there, and pick up the brown calf-bound book with the queer scratchy print, that Jane-Anne already loved because she knew it was Greek, and fall a-reading, only to be instantly recalled by a vegetable dish presented at his elbow and a prim low voice (even her voice was modelled on Mrs. Methuen's parlour-maid) remarking, "Cabbage, sir," or something of the sort.

But although Jane-Anne completely forgot herself in the ardour of her impersonation, Mr. Wycherly after the very first did not forget Jane-Anne.

"Couldn't you stand where I can see you?" he suggested after about a week of her ministrations, "or better still, sit down."

"Oh, sir, I mustn't sit down," she remonstrated in shocked tones; "parlour-maids never do that."

"Don't they?" said Mr. Wycherly. "It's so long since I had a parlour-maid I've forgotten. When I was young I was generally waited upon by men, and in Scotland we never had any waiting at all; we helped each other."

"Men are best," Jane-Anne replied from her place on the hearth-rug, where she had obediently taken her stand. "If I grow up good-looking perhaps I may marry a first footman."

"Good God!" ejaculated Mr. Wycherly in tones of the utmost consternation.

Jane-Anne looked surprised.

"There was a first footman at Dursley House. Oh, he *was* a beautiful young man!" she exclaimed in reminiscent rapture; "so dignified."

Mr. Wycherly was quite shaken out of his usual smiling fatalism. Had he been able at the moment to analyse his feelings he would have been amazed at the violence of his objection to a first footman as a possible husband for Jane-Anne. But just then he was only conscious of strong resentment at the very idea.

It was one thing for her to wait upon him, but to think of his Greek nymph in intimate relations with anybody's first footman was inconceivable. He grew hot all over, and his chief desire at that moment was to knock somebody down.

There she stood by the fireplace, slender and virginal and sweet, a graceful, gracious figure in the straight blue linen dress Mrs. Methuen had chosen for her, regarding him with large

surprised brown eyes, and calmly proposing to marry a footman.

"Do you not think it would be nice?" she asked.

"My dear," said Mr. Wycherly, recovering himself with difficulty and striving ineffectually to speak with his usual calm detachment, "it is an outrageous and impossible contingency, and I beg that you will forthwith dismiss it from your mind at once and for ever."

"Sir, you are not eating your dinner," Jane-Anne remarked after a moment's silence.

"How can I eat if you suggest such horrible things?" Mr. Wycherly complained.

"But I'd like to marry somebody," Jane-Anne protested, "and I wouldn't like an ugly person."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Wycherly. "Are footmen the only good-looking men in the world?"

"They're the best-looking men in our walk in life, sir," Jane-Anne rejoined primly, in exact imitation of her aunt.

"Come here, Jane-Anne," said Mr. Wycherly.

She went obediently and stood beside him.

"Have you ever thought," he said gravely, "that your walk in life may be precisely what you choose to make it?"

"No, sir," she said frankly, "I've always supposed I should be a servant—there doesn't seem anything else for me to be. You see, aunt knows she could get me into a good family."

"I don't think you're strong enough for a servant," Mr. Wycherly objected.

"Then," she said decidedly, "I think I'd better be a ward."

"A ward?" Mr. Wycherly repeated in puzzled tones.

"Your ward, like Master Edmund and Master Montagu. I'd like that, it would be lovelly."

Mr. Wycherly laughed. "It seems to me," he said, "that I have already adopted you."

"Then that's all right for just now, but afterwards, when I'm grown up, what would *you* like me to be, sir?"

"We'll think about that later on. Just now I want you to be an entirely happy little girl, to dance in the sunshine and get fat and merry——"

"I hope I shall never be fat," she interrupted. "I think it's hideous."

"Well, perhaps not fat—but plump and round and jolly—to learn all your good aunt teaches you and to read for yourself——"

"May I read the books in the book-case in the parlour?" she asked eagerly. "I'll be so careful. I don't spoil books, I truly don't."

"Certainly you may; you will find many excellent books among them, and when I come back—I'm going to London for a few days, to-morrow—you shall tell me what you have read and we'll talk it over together."

The book-case in the dining-room was full of books that had belonged to Miss Esperance; and Mr. Wycherly felt that he was perfectly safe in giving Jane-Anne permission to read any of them. He had never even troubled to see what they were. He knew there was a whole edition of Sir

Walter and most of the standard novels up to about the year 1870. Many theological works, and the little gilt books—precious these—that had come to Miss Esperance from her own mother.

"You won't be long away, I hope, sir?" Jane-Anne said wistfully. "It will seem very lonely when you are gone."

"I shall not be a moment longer than I can help, and I shall expect to hear all sorts of interesting news when I come back."

"Do you think I could ever learn to be a lady, sir—if I can't be a servant?"

"I see no reason why you should not grow up a very charming lady."

"But ladies don't dust and wash dishes and do things like I do."

"As I do," Mr. Wycherly corrected almost mechanically. Then, as if he had not spoken, he went on, "the best and most beautiful lady I ever knew did all these things."

"Did she like doing them?"

"I don't think she ever thought much about what she liked or disliked. She did what she had to do, and did it better and more gracefully than anybody else."

She pondered over this. It seemed to her an impossible ideal. How could anyone do a thing "more gracefully than anybody else" just because it had to be done? Liking had everything to do with Jane-Anne's doings.

When she had cleared away, Mr. Wycherly sat long over his glass of port. He did not read. He did not drink his wine, but sat on at the table

staring at nothing, and wondering about the future of this queer, lonely child who had crept into his heart so quietly and imperceptibly that not till she made that astounding announcement as to her matrimonial ambitions did he realise how dear she had become.

He had released the starling; it was true.

The bird was very tame, and came at call to his hand; but the wings were there, young and strong and untried.

When the time came for flight, whither would they bear her?

* * * *

On Thursday Mr. Wycherly went to London. He was to remain over Sunday, in order to hear an old friend preach at the Temple Church. On Friday morning Jane-Anne hied her to the parlour to inspect the book-case.

It is true that all the books in the dining-room had belonged to Miss Esperance, but Mr. Wycherly had reckoned without the Admiral. His books were there too. These included the works of Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett, and there was on the top shelf a long row of little books, "the dear and dumpy twelves" beloved by our ancestors.

The book-case was a tall one, and, with the natural perversity of children, Jane-Anne attacked the top row first. Just because she could not reach it, she desired ardently to look at the small dull-coloured books on the top shelf. So she dragged up a chair, placed a work-box upon that, and then, mounted upon the two, she could read

the titles on the books, and pull the books out at her ease.

There were ten little books all alike, bound in dark green cloth with a shield and a coronet in gold above the title on the backs, and a golden crest on the front cover. Haphazard she pulled one out just to look at it.

Evidently it had been much read at one time, for it opened of itself and she saw that it was poetry and that certain of the verses were marked at the side in pencil, just as she marked her favourite texts.

> "The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece,
> Where burning Sappho loved and sung."

Where had she heard those lines before?

Slowly and carefully she read on till she gave a little cry, and nearly fell off the work-box in her excitement.

> "The mountains look on Marathon—
> And Marathon looks on the sea—
> And musing there an hour alone,
> I dreamed that Greece might still be free."

The long quest was at an end.

The poem that her father had chanted as he used to carry her about, was found.

She jumped off the work-box on to the floor, and sat down upon it, leaning her back against the book-case.

The tears were wet on her cheeks as she read, and her breath came quickly as though she had been running. She was deeply moved. She repeated the lines softly, whispering them to

herself, sometimes mispronouncing the long words, but ever vividly and intensely alive to the music of the measure, to the nobility of the conception, to the tragic dignity of its expression.

The dew of genius had fallen upon the thought, and the words bloomed again in their fiery beauty for this small, unlettered girl, who, with something of the spirit of old Greece, sat weeping over the wonder of it.

Over and over again she read those sixteen verses, till she heard her aunt calling her to come to dinner, and, carrying the precious work with her, she darted upstairs to her bedroom, hid it in a drawer, and rushed down again in a tumult of excitement that could find no outlet.

"You've got a cold, Jane-Anne," said Mrs. Dew as she carved the joint. "Your nose is red an' you're sniffling."

Jane-Anne did not explain. The imputation must be borne.

"I don't think it's much, aunt," she said meekly. "Did you ever," she added in her eager way, "hear of anybody called Lord Byron?"

"He never visited where I lived," Mrs. Dew answered; "but then there's a-many lords as I never heerd on. Why do you want to know?"

"I only wondered. It would have been nice if you'd known about him. He wrote poetry."

"Then I shouldn't think as he was much of a lord. The real old families don't do such things. Perhaps he made his money in beer (there's a good many such) and then took to writing poetry to amuse himself when he'd retired. You may

depend it was somethin' of the sort. Now you come to mention it, I've a notion as your mother had some of his poetry books. She'd seen the places as he wrote about—yet I don't hold much with poetry myself, and the books was all sold—only a few pence they fetched—after she died."

Jane-Anne felt chilled and disappointed. She disliked the smell of beer exceedingly, and to connect it with the author of these soul-stirring verses was impossible. She could find out, she was sure, all about Lord Byron when Mr. Wycherly returned; but she was an impatient person—how could she wait until then?

A bright thought struck her.

"Aunt, don't you think I ought to answer Master Montagu's letter?" she asked diplomatically. "Will you give me a stamp, and I'll do it this afternoon."

"Mind you're respectful and proper—you'd better let me see the letter before it goes. And if it's suitable I'll give you a stamp."

"Very well, aunt," Jane-Anne sighed. It was very hard to write what would seem suitable to those unsympathetic eyes—but she'd have a try for the thing she wanted.

Ink was provided, one sheet of paper, an envelope, a pen, with a point like a needle, and a single sheet of much-used blotting-paper.

Jane-Anne sat down at the table in the housekeeper's room and wrote in a neat, round hand:

"Dear Master Montagu,

"I send my duty and the master was quite well when he left yesterday.

"I wait upon him at meals and he doesn't read at all now; he talks to me, and I think he eats pretty well considering. I also go out with him, which is very beautiful. It is very sad here now he is gone. I wonder if you are acquainted with a poetry book named 'Don-Juan,' or if you think it squish like 'Home Influence.' I don't think it is like 'Home Influence,' but I love it, I shall read it all, it is in two vols. The master said I was to read any books I liked in the parlour; there are ten volumes by his Lordship there. I shall read them all. Can you tell me if he is one of the real gentry like Lord Dursley. I would like to see him.

"Yours respectfully,

"JANE-ANNE."

Mrs. Dew read the letter through and grunted that it was much too long, but she gave Jane-Anne a stamp, which she immediately affixed. Then she frolicked gleefully to the post and put her precious missive in the box.

CHAPTER XIII

A FAR CRY

"I have not loved the world, nor the world me—
But let us part fair foes; I do believe,
Though I have found them not, that there may be
Words which are things, hopes which will not deceive,
And virtues which are merciful, nor weave
Snares for the failing; I would also deem
O'er others' griefs that some sincerely grieve;
That two, or one, are almost what they seem,
That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream."

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.

The boys always wrote to Mr. Wycherly on Sundays, and as they knew he was to be in London over the week-end, he duly received his weekly letters on Monday morning at Morley's Hotel.

Edmund's was, as usual, brief and to the point. He hoped his guardian was well; he announced the cheering intelligence that he himself was well, and after a brief reference to his most recent scores at cricket, concluded with the information: "It is expensive here at school; the munny I came back with is all gone; it is very inconvenient. Could you spair me a little more?"

Montagu talked of his work and of the Greek

play they were reading, and then he finished up with: "I had quite a decent letter from Jane-Anne. Whatever made you start her on Byron? I haven't read 'Don Juan' myself, but I suppose I must, as she has, then we can talk about it in the holidays."

Mr. Wycherly read this portion of Montagu's letter three times, frowned over it, pondered it; and finally, *apropos* of nothing, found himself repeating Miss Stukely's favourite quotation which had remained in his mind with provoking persistency.

"You in your small corner, I in mine." He hadn't the vaguest notion whence this flower of thought was culled, but it occurred to him at that moment that Jane-Anne's small corner must have been considerably enlarged during the last few days if she had read much of "Don Juan."

"It is quite time I returned to Holywell," Mr. Wycherly reflected. "What possible wind of fate has blown 'Don Juan,' of all things, across the child's path? And what in the world will she make of it?"

He went back to Holywell that afternoon, and Jane-Anne carried in his tea in her best parlour-maid manner, only to relapse immediately into herself, falling upon her knees by his chair and covering his hand with kisses the moment she had set down the tray.

"My child, my child," exclaimed Mr. Wycherly, "it is very wonderful and delightful of you to be so glad. But you must get up and sit beside me and pour out tea, and tell me all the news,

and what has been happening since I went away, and what you have been doing with yourself?"

"A very great thing has happened," Jane-Anne said solemnly, holding the teapot poised in mid-air. "I have found it."

Mr. Wycherly nearly said, "Found what?" but he stopped himself just in time, and remembered "the mountains," and asked kindly:

"Well, and where is it?"

"In Marathon," said Jane-Anne gravely. "Do you know it?"

"Yes," Mr. Wycherly replied, "and it is a curious thing that I was reminded of that very poem when I saw you dancing in the garden. I wonder why I didn't connect it with your mountains?"

"I often dance. I dance when I'm happy, and I dance when I'm very full of feelings, not exactly happy, but—big, tremendous feelings."

"Tell me, my child, what you think of 'Don Juan' as far as you have read."

"Poor dear," cried Jane-Anne, "he *was* so unfortunate. No sooner did he get comfortably settled with a nice, beautiful lady than some cross old husband or father, or somebody, interfered. It was a shame."

"Perhaps," Mr. Wycherly suggested, "there may have been something to say on their side, too, you know. Though it is a side less often treated by the writers of romance."

"Haidée's father was horrid," she cried vehemently. "You must think so, too, don't you?"

"Suppose," said Mr. Wycherly, "I went away for a long time, so long that you came to the conclusion I was dead——"

"I should die, too," Jane-Anne interrupted.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't. Suppose, say, that some very charming and delightful youth appeared who took up all your attention, and suddenly I came back to find you giving a grand party in the garden."

"Aunt would never permit it for one minute," she cried, aghast.

"But we must eliminate aunt; Haidée, so far as we know, had no wise and excellent aunt to look after her. Let me see. Oh, yes! Suppose I came back and found this festivity going on, the agreeable youth acting as host, and you, my dear, entirely absorbed in him, and the whole house upside down. Would you expect me to feel very amiable?"

Jane-Anne gazed earnestly at Mr. Wycherly. The gentle, high-bred face was quite grave, though persons better versed than Jane-Anne in subtleties of expression might have noted a look of considerable amusement in his handsome eyes.

"But Haidée's father wasn't a bit like you," she objected. "He was a cruel pirate."

"Even pirates have their parental feelings," he pleaded.

Jane-Anne looked much perturbed.

"It sounds horrid said like that," she murmured sadly; "but it's beautiful in the poetry book."

"How much have you read?" asked Mr. Wycherly.

"Only to where poor, pretty Haidée dies. I don't read very fast, you know—not like you, sir, and Master Montagu; and when I like a bit I read it over and over again."

"And what do you like best in the book so far as you have gone?"

"Oh, my father's poem, far, far the best. I can say it nearly all by heart. But one reason I've been so slow is, I wanted dreadfully to know about Lord Byron, and in the bottom shelf, where 'Sir Stamord Raffles' is, I found a book all about him, a fat crimson book, and I've been reading that."

"Really," Mr. Wycherly remarked, "you've lost no time. Well, and what do you make of that?"

"It's rather difficult, sir, so many letters; but he seems to have been very unlucky, too, like Don Juan. A *most* unkind mother; fancy, she threw the fireirons at him, and her one of the gentry—and his wife didn't seem very nice either—and then I looked at the end——"

"Well?" said Mr. Wycherly, for Jane-Anne paused suddenly.

"And I found he's dead, and he died to help Greece; and I'm so sorry."

"Sorry he died to help Greece?"

"No, for that's why my daddie loved him, I'm sure of that; but because he's dead. *I* should have loved him dearly."

"A great many people did that," said Mr. Wycherly.

"I shall read all his poetry books, and learn all

the bits I like; and then—perhaps—do you think that, up in heaven, he could ever know how much I cared?"

Mr. Wycherly looked into the eager, wistful face, and wondered, too.

"Listen to me, my child," he said. "I think that if Lord Byron does know, he is much pleased and touched; but I also think that he would be the very first person to suggest that you should wait a little before you read all his poetry. If you will allow me, I will select the volumes I think he would prefer you to begin on. 'Don Juan,' for instance, I should leave alone for the present; directly you know by heart and can write out, in your most beautiful writing, the whole of your favourite poem from the third canto——"

"I can do that now," she cried eagerly. "Would it please Lord Byron, do you think, sir?"

"I am certain of it."

"And you'll tell me what you think he'd like me to read. I should so love to do something for him; poor dear, so sad and lonely often. Did you ever know him, sir?"

Mr. Wycherly shook his head. "He died a good many years before I was born."

"So long ago!" Jane-Anne's voice was solemn and awestruck, for Mr. Wycherly seemed to her incalculably old and wise.

"One thing, sir," she continued in quite a different tone, "I have quite altered. I shan't marry a first footman—I shall marry a poet. I shall hunt about till I find someone like Lord

Byron—if he's a lord so much the better. I'd like that; but if he isn't—if he can say very beautiful things, I shall love him just the same. Shall you like that better, sir?"

Mr. Wycherly sighed. "I'm afraid, my dear, that I'm a selfish old curmudgeon, who would like to keep you in his heart-pocket always. I shan't like any of them."

"Then I shall stay in your pocket," said Jane-Anne.

It was time to clear away, and she took the tea-things back to the kitchen.

Mr. Wycherly went into the parlour, a room he rarely entered except when the boys were at home. He set his glasses firmly on his nose, and inspected the contents of the book-case.

Just before he went away, Jane-Anne had pressed her favourite "Bruey" upon him, and he had read it. Now he took down the second volume of "Don Juan"—the first was missing—from the top shelf, and turned the leaves, shaking his head:

"It's a far cry from Bruey to Byron," thought Mr. Wycherly. "I wonder if I have done the right thing? On one point I am quite convinced; for the ultimate safety of that child we must set about developing her sense of humour at once."

Jane-Anne was so excited over her find, that she wrote to Miss Stukely to tell her about it. This time she begged a sheet of paper and an envelope from Mr. Wycherly, and he gave her a packet of each, the envelopes ready stamped,

being the kind he always used. She was highly elated, carried the ink to her bedroom without consulting her aunt, and sat down at her wash-stand to indite the following letter:

"DEAR TEACHER,

"I hope you are well. I am well and most happy. I live with my aunt, and I have a carpet in my bedroom—not oilcloth; and it is a beautiful big room. The master here is like an angel—he is so kind and good. There are a most enormous lot of books in this house. I hope to read them all before I am grown up. I am learning the Greek alphabet. The master is teaching me. Do you know of a poet called Lord Byron? I am reading all his poetry books. I am sure you would love them. I found a poem my father used to say to me when I was a little girl. I was so glad. Lord Byron wrote it, too. He is in heaven, so I can't see him. With love and duty, from your affectionate friend,

"JANE-ANNE."

By return of post came a letter from Miss Stukely.

"MY DEAR JANE-ANNE,

"I was glad to hear from you that your health is better. But, dear childie, there was much in your letter to disquiet me. I do beg of you to read no more poetry that is not known to be of sound evangelical teaching. I should like you to promise me that you will not read any poetry except what is by Frances Ridley Havergal, Eliza Cook, or Mrs. Hemans. The works of those three saintly women can only do

you good, and there is only too great reason to fear that poetry as a rule leads one's thoughts away from higher things. So promise me this, my dear girlie, that my mind may be at rest about you. As to this Lord Byron you mention, I have never read any poem of his and I never shall, for I understand that he was a man of very evil life, and an unbeliever, and that it is quite unlikely he is in heaven, as you seem to suppose. I hope you will dismiss him and all his works from your mind. I cannot see any use in your learning the Greek alphabet. The Ancient Greeks were wicked heathens, and it can do no one any good to know about them. I hope you read 'The Upward Path' regularly. I shall always be glad to hear from you, and I shall never fail to remember you in my prayers. Like our dear Bruey, I keep my daily little list and I hope you do the same.

"Let me have your promise, dear girlie, and I shall feel more happy about you—although we are parted in body we can still commune in spirit, and I shall be most happy to supervise your reading, and to send you little suitable books from time to time. I have a sweet class at the Bainbridge, and our weekly meetings are very helpful. Always your friend and well-wisher,

"Blanche Stukely."

Jane-Anne found this letter somewhat difficult to decipher, as Miss Stukely wrote a sloping, pointed hand, much more trying to read than that of Montagu or his guardian.

So, in defiance of all her aunt's rules, she invaded Mr. Wycherly in his study directly after

breakfast, and asked him to read it aloud for her. He did so, and when he had finished she cast herself upon the ground despairingly, and burst into violent sobs.

This tragic reception of what, to him, seemed a singularly ill-considered and narrow-minded letter, fairly flabbergasted Mr. Wycherly, and for a minute or two he sat at his table in perfect silence, holding Miss Stukely's missive in his hand, irritably aware that it was written on scented note-paper, and that he abominated the odour. He looked down at the lithe, slender figure prone upon the floor in absolute abandonment of grief, and at last he asked:

"Why do you cry, Jane-Anne?"

Jane-Anne rolled over, sat up, and gasped out between her sobs:

"Because she says he isn't in heaven, and if he isn't in heaven then he must be in hell for ever and ever, and I can never, never feel happy any more."

"Get up, child, and sit upon a chair," Mr. Wycherly said sternly. He had an old-fashioned objection to scenes, and an indefinable feeling that to lie on the floor was neither decorous nor dignified, even for a little girl of twelve. Neither physical or mental *déshabillé* appealed to him. "Now tell me, why should you take it for granted that Lord Byron—is not in heaven?"

A ray of light pierced the gloom of her outlook, and she stopped crying to ask eagerly: "Is Miss Stukely wrong, then; was he a good man after all?"

"Even supposing he were not what is popularly considered a good man. Even so, what right has this Miss Stukely, or anybody else, to conclude that Lord Byron——"

"Is in hell." Jane-Anne glibly finished the sentence.

"Exactly," said Mr. Wycherly. "What right has she, I say, to assume anything of the kind?"

"But the wicked do go there."

"What about the thief on the cross?" asked Mr. Wycherly.

"But he repented," she answered promptly.

"And how do you, or Miss Stukely, or I, or anyone know that Lord Byron was unrepentant?"

"Then you think it is all right?" she asked anxiously.

"I am sure it is all right," Mr. Wycherly replied confidently.

"Could you lend me your handkerchief, sir?" Jane-Anne asked. "I seem to have lost mine."

Refreshed by the borrowed handkerchief, and much comforted in soul, she turned to another part of the letter, asking:

"Do those ladies she speaks of write beautiful poetry, like my mountains piece?"

"I am not well versed in the writings of the ladies Miss Stukely mentions," Mr. Wycherly said, cautiously, "but I fancy I am safe in saying that their work does not display the highest poetical genius, although it is doubtless very pleasing to their admirers."

"Would you promise, if you was me?"

"Certainly not," he answered vigorously.

"Nothing would induce me to promise anything so absurd."

"Absurd?" Jane-Anne's voice was astonished! it was not an adjective which she would have applied to anything so serious.

"Most ridiculous," Mr. Wycherly repeated.

"She will be sorry, and she was very kind to me."

"Never forget her kindness, repay it if ever you get the chance; but *never* promise anybody anything without fully understanding what you undertake."

"Not even you, sir?"

"Certainly not me, of all people—but I hope I should never ask you to make impossible promises."

"Then I may go on loving Lord Byron?"

"It seems to me that you ought to love him more if you think that he was sinful and unfortunate, and unhappy. It's a poor sort of love that only cares for the good, the fortunate, the successful."

"Christ was fond of unfortunate people," Jane-Anne said softly. Not altogether in vain had she read her New Testament.

"Ah," said Mr. Wycherly, "that is a phase of His character certain of His followers are apt to forget."

"I shall tell Miss Stukely that," Jane-Anne remarked perkily.

"You most certainly will do nothing of the kind. You must not preach at people—it's—it's so ill-bred."

Poor Jane-Anne looked exceedingly puzzled.

"It's a very funny thing," she said thoughtfully. "Nothing could be differenter than aunt and a real gentleman like you, and yet, sometimes, you both say the same sort of thing. Only, you call it ill-bred, and she'd call it the heighth of impidence."

"You may take it that we both mean the same thing," said Mr. Wycherly; and his kind eyes twinkled.

"Well, I don't understand, and I know aunt'll be raging because I'm not there to help to make the beds, but I'm happier. Here's your handkerchief, sir, and many thanks."

And Jane-Anne thrust a damp and sticky ball into Mr. Wycherly's hand, quite unconscious of offence.

When the door shut behind her, he dropped the handkerchief into his waste-paper basket, and he laughed. It was so like Montagu or Edmund.

CHAPTER XIV

AN EXPERIMENT

"Canst play the fiddle?" asked the stranger.
"I don't know," quoth the Irishman, "but I'll try if you'll lend me the instrument."—OLD LEGEND.

MRS. METHUEN was having tea with Mr. Wycherly under the apple-tree at the side of the lawn. She came very often to see him for the simple reason that she found it so exceedingly difficult to persuade him to come and see her. He always protested that he had lived out of the world too long to go a-visiting now, that he did not know how to behave in society, that he was a fusty old anchorite whom no one could really want.

Now, Mrs. Methuen really did want him, so she came to see him instead, to their great mutual satisfaction, and as it was a fine summer and she generally came at tea-time, Mrs. Dew would set it for them under the apple-tree on the lawn, and Jane-Anne was allowed to carry out the cakes and bread-and-butter.

On this particular afternoon they had discussed Jane-Anne's future, for Mrs. Methuen was full of a new plan, and when she had a new plan she was wont to be most enthusiastic.

"You see," she was saying, "it would be so much more original than being a governess; they don't do any heavy work, and the uniform *is* so charming, she'd look sweet in it."

"But do you think," Mr. Wycherly asked dubiously, "that Jane-Anne has any special gift for looking after little children? She has had no experience; why should she be particularly fitted for that?"

"She would be trained," cried Mrs. Methuen eagerly; "it is a splendid training, and the girls are so sought after—Norland Nurses are never out of a place——"

"Is your nurse a Norland Nurse?" asked Mr. Wycherly, trying to remember if he had seen Mrs. Methuen's nurse in any very enchanting uniform, but only succeeding in a faint remembrance of a stout, comfortable person who certainly did look "used to babies."

"Well, no," Mrs. Methuen answered, a trifle shamefaced. "You see, mother thought I was young and inexperienced and we had all known Nannie such years, and—she's Nannie, you see, and no one else was possible."

"Of course, of course," Mr. Wycherly agreed hastily. "I'm sure it is most good of you to interest yourself so warmly in Jane-Anne, and such a career might prove most suitable—but would it not be well to see—could we not bring her into contact with some little child and see how they get on."

"I have it," cried Mrs. Methuen; "she shall go and mind Mrs. Cox's baby on the days the

nursery is turned out; it would be a great help to her. They're not well off, you know, and she has only one servant besides the nurse, and it will give Jane-Anne a taste for babies: her baby's a perfect darling. It's a beautiful idea—so helpful to poor Mrs. Cox and so good for Jane-Anne, and she lives so close, too, only a few doors down the street. I'll go and propose it to her now and come back and tell you what she says."

No sooner said than done. Mrs. Methuen found Mrs. Cox at home, unfolded her scheme to her, laying stress on the benefit it would be to Jane-Anne and on Jane-Anne's exceptional fitness for the task. She also pointed out the unusual advantages the baby would enjoy in having so refined and charming an unpaid under-nurse (Mrs Methuen was fond of Jane-Anne) and hinted at all sorts of possibilities when she should be older and more experienced.

Mrs. Cox, wife of a young doctor as yet not very abundantly blessed with patients, embraced the idea with effusion, and Mrs. Methuen flew back to Mr. Wycherly to tell him she had arranged it and that Jane-Anne might make her *début* as an embryo Norland Nurse on Tuesday, that day being Friday.

"She mustn't attempt to carry a heavy baby," Mr. Wycherly exclaimed anxiously, knitting his brows distressedly.

"Of course not," Mrs. Methuen said decidedly. "She'd wheel the darling up and down Holywell in her pram, or perhaps in South Parks Road, it's so nice and quiet."

"I hope it's not a heavy perambulator," Mr. Wycherly murmured.

"Now don't you worry. No one would dream of setting Jane-Anne to do anything hard or heavy. You wouldn't, I suppose, object to her sitting with the baby on her knee, would you? She's quite a little baby, only six months old and very small."

"No," Mr. Wycherly said doubtfully, "if you think it's quite safe for the baby."

"My dear Mr. Wycherly, Jane-Anne is nearly thirteen."

"I know," he answered humbly, "that I must appear foolishly nervous to you—but a tiny baby always seems to me so brittle, and Jane-Anne herself is—so fragile—she might drop it."

"Don't you worry," Mrs. Methuen repeated consolingly. "Mrs. Cox will take every care of Jane-Anne, and Jane-Anne will take every care of the baby. Besides, it's only once a week on nursery cleaning day."

Then Mrs. Methuen went to see Mrs. Dew in the kitchen and unfolded the scheme to her.

Mrs. Dew, of cautious Cotswold habit, viewed the plan with marked distrust, but she was too well-trained a servant to do other than seem to acquiesce gratefully in Mrs. Methuen's kind efforts to benefit her niece. So it was settled that Jane-Anne should go to Mrs. Cox on Tuesday morning at ten for a couple of hours, as Mrs. Methuen had arranged. The one person who was not consulted was Jane-Anne herself.

Term was over. The men had all gone down,

and next day the Methuen household was off to the seaside.

Mrs. Methuen's visit to Mr. Wycherly had been to bid him farewell for a space; and in arranging this for Jane-Anne she felt she had been really helpful.

Mr. Wycherly had consulted Mrs. Methuen on many matters connected with the child. For one thing he had begged her to assist him in developing her sense of humour. Whereupon she sent Jane-Anne both the "Alices," and suggested she should be allowed to see *Punch* every week. She also gave her "German Popular Stories" and "A Flat Iron for a Farthing." These works were all of absorbing interest and somewhat interrupted Jane-Anne's study of Lord Byron, as had been intended.

Punch she took to her heart at once; not on account of the Immortal Jester's humour, but because of the beautiful ladies depicted by Mr. Du Maurier. These she whole-heartedly admired and set herself to imitate.

All the same, Jane-Anne was getting on. She laughed very often now, sometimes from sheer joy at being in a world where there were people so kind and delightful as Mrs. Methuen and Mr. Wycherly; sometimes because things really did seem funny. She began to realise, too, that it was possible to jest; that Mr. Wycherly often said things that he did not mean; and that it was conceivable that you might love a person with all your heart and soul and yet be perfectly cognisant of their little weaknesses and oddities. Mr. and

Mrs. Methuen taught her this, quite unconsciously, while she waited upon them when tney lunched with Mr. Wycherly.

Jane-Anne was a quick study.

That night as she waited upon "the master" at dinner, he unfolded to her Mrs. Methuen's plan, and Jane-Anne at once burst into floods of tears, declaring hotly that she'd rather be his parlour-maid than anybody's nurse, "not if it was a prince." That she didn't want to wait upon a horrid little baby when there was her own dear master to wait upon, and she'd promised Master Montagu!

Very gently, Mr. Wycherly explained the arrangement, and when she heard of the uniform the training lost some of its horror.

"I shan't have to go for years and years, shall I?" she asked.

"Certainly not for many years, never at all if you don't like it."

"And I'm to practise on Mrs. Cox's baby?"

"You are to take care—the greatest care—of Mrs. Cox's baby for a short time once a week."

"Do *you* want me to?"

Candidly, Mr. Wycherly wanted nothing less. He detested schemes for the ultimate employment of Jane-Anne. To him, everything suggested seemed incongruous and infeasible, but he mistrusted his own judgment in practical matters and bowed before the youthful wisdom and general competence of Mrs. Methuen.

"I think," he said guardedly, "that every woman ought to know how to manage a baby."

"I wonder," she said dreamily, "if Lord Byron would approve of it?"

'As we have no means of finding out, let's take it that he will," he answered drily.

"I don't like the name Norland," she objected.

"It will be years before you are even ready to apply for admission to the Norland Institute," said Mr. Wycherly.

"If it's an institution, I'm not going," she said firmly.

"What you have got to do is to see how well you can look after Mrs. Cox's baby."

"I'll do my best, I really will," said Jane-Anne, "and it'll be rather fun to wheel it about, and I shall look very proud and stand-off like Mrs. Methuen's Nannie. I expect people will admire me very much and wonder whose nurse I am."

"That is possible," Mr. Wycherly politely acquiesced.

"Shall I have to make the beds that morning, sir?"

"That, my dear child, is your good aunt's province, not mine."

"Master, dear—whenever you speak of aunt to me, you say she's good, or worthy, or excellent, or sensible—do you say those nice things about me when I'm not there? Do you say 'my excellent Jane-Anne' when you talk about me to Mrs. Methuen. I hope you do—or 't' at most sensible girl'—do you?"

"How do you know I ever talk about you at all to Mrs. Methuen?"

Jane-Anne looked rather foolish for a moment,

then brightened as she remarked: "But you must to know all about Mrs. Cox's baby and Norland Nurses, and that. I'm sorry, though, that the young gentlemen have all gone down, I'd like them to have seen me wheeling the pram."

"My dear child," exclaimed Mr. Wycherly with real consternation in his voice. "You surely don't suppose that a well-bred undergraduate would be aware of the existence of a little girl wheeling a perambulator."

"They're aware of *my* existence, anyway, master, dear. I heard one say one day: 'Look what hair that flapper's got.'"

"A most impertinent and ill-bred young man. I hope you felt very angry."

"Angry?" she repeated in a surprised voice. "Oh no, I was pleased he should admire my hair. It *is* very long, you know."

Mr. Wycherly groaned, but he said nothing more, only registering a mental vow to the effect that nothing would induce him to allow Jane-Anne to wheel anybody's perambulator once the men came up again. "But she'll be safely at school then," he reflected, "and there will be an end of these ridiculous schemes."

Mrs. Dew discussed the question with her niece during their supper in the housekeeper's room.

"I don't fancy the notion much, myself," she said. "A nurse as is worth having for a nurse is born so, and I don't see as any institution will either make or mar her. Bein' a fine lady with someone else to do your nurseries'd suit you

well enough, I've no doubt, but whether you'd ever learn to do *your* part is more than mortal can say."

"Aunt, what do you do with a baby if it cries?"

"Turn it face downwards on your knee an' pat it gentle—ten to one it's got wind, poor little soul, and that'll break it up. Many's the time I've held you that way an' you starin' at the carpet with those great eyes of yours as good as gold. But you won't have much nursing to do—it's wheelin' that you'll be doin', an' mind as you don't let the wheel go over the kerb. Whatever it is you're doin', Jane-Anne, for mercy's sake think about that thing, and don't go dreamin' of poetry books and such foolhardy nonsense."

Tuesday came and it poured with rain.

Jane-Anne duly made her timid appearance at Mrs. Cox's and was shown into Mrs. Cox's study, where the baby sat propped up in her pram while her mother pushed her back and forth to amuse her. Mrs. Cox stayed for a little, then the baby showed signs of wanting to go to sleep, so she was laid down and Jane-Anne was instructed to continue the gentle to-and-fro movement till she "went off," and Mrs. Cox departed to see to some household matters elsewhere, leaving the door open.

The Cox baby was fair and plump and pretty, and appeared an entirely exemplary infant, for in five minutes she was fast asleep.

Jane-Anne stopped pushing the perambulator to and fro, and sat down to look round. There

was a book-case at one side of the fireplace and its two lowest shelves were full of bound volumes of *Mr. Punch.* In a moment her quick eyes had taken in this pleasing fact, and she had one of the big flat books open on her knee. She looked at the pictures and read the legends beneath them with great content for a little while, always, however, with one eye on the perambulator and ears alert to catch the faintest movement from its occupant.

Presently there was a little stir and the indescribable soft sound a baby makes when it is just waking up. From the room above came sundry bumps and scrapings that proclaimed the cleaning to be in full swing. She darted to the perambulator and looked in; the baby, rosy and warm and adorable, looked up at her and smiled. It was too much for Jane-Anne. She forgot Mrs. Cox's instructions that she was on no account to lift the baby out when it woke, but to call her. She seized the small delicious bundle that stretched and cuddled against her and sat down on the low seat close by the book-case.

Baby began to whimper.

Jane-Anne repeated "See-saw, Margery Daw," but the baby evidently was impervious to the charms of poetry, and the whimper grew a little more decided.

Then there flashed into Jane-Anne's perturbed mind her aunt's instructions: "Turn it face downwards on your knee and pat it gentle." No sooner thought of than done, and it was, apparently, quite successful.

Jane-Anne had just got to a very interesting part of *Punch*, and she longed to return to it. As the baby was evidently quiet and happy, she felt she might go back to her study of the Great Jester—nurses always were reading—even while they wheeled their prams—so it was all right. She kept one hand on the baby's back to steady it and tried to hold up the volume of *Punch* with the other, but *Punch* was heavy and she was not very successful.

Presently a brilliant thought struck her: If *Punch* was open on the top of the baby, it would fulfil a double purpose, keep the baby from rolling off her knee, and amuse her, Jane-Anne.

It really was a very fascinating *Punch.*

For a moment Miss Cox was perfectly quiet. The heavy weight across her back petrified her with astonishment. She tried to lift her head to see what it all meant, but some hard substance caught her just in the nape of the neck and prevented her doing anything of the kind.

Such an indignity was not to be borne for an instant.

Miss Cox filled her lungs as well as she could, considering how compressed she was, and gave vent to a good hearty roar of rage and grief that such impertinent persons should be left loose in a naughty world.

Jane-Anne absently patted the pages of *Mr. Punch* and read on absorbedly.

There was a pause in the cleansing operations overhead. A door was opened hastily and quick steps descended from above. At the same instant,

another door was opened just across the hall, and Mrs. Cox and the nurse met at the open study door to behold the cause of the uproar.

Jane-Anne was never very clear as to what happened during the next three minutes. All she knew was that *Mr. Punch* fell violently on the floor to the ultimate detriment of his back—the baby was seized from her and two people hurled indignant reproaches at her while the baby, once more in a position to inflate properly, filled the air with angry wails.

Of course Jane-Anne wept too. She made no excuses, for there were none to be made, and this rather disarmed Mrs. Cox, who was kindly and gentle, and finding that only the baby's feelings were hurt, recovered her sense of humour, laughed, and bade Jane-Anne go back to her aunt as she was evidently not fitted yet for an under-nurse.

Nurse, with the baby clasped safely in her arms, had already stalked upstairs in high dudgeon.

Soon after eleven o'clock, a meek, draggled, tear-stained Jane-Anne crept in at the side-door in Holywell. Mrs. Dew was in the front of the house "turning out" the dining-room, as her niece had observed as she passed the windows.

Upstairs she flew and reached Mr. Wycherly's study door undetected. She looked particularly forlorn and miserable, for she wore her aunt's macintosh, a voluminous purple garment much too large for her. She had left her umbrella at the Cox's in the shame of her hasty exit, and the

heavy rain had beaten upon her face, mingling with her tears. Very timidly she knocked.

Mr. Wycherly had quick ears, and he knew that knock.

"Come in, my child; they didn't need you long," he said, always with the same kind welcome in his voice.

Jane-Anne shut the door softly and rushed across the room to throw herself on her knees at his side.

"I'm sent away," she cried tragically; "dismissed, disgraced; I don't know what aunt will say."

"What in the world has occurred?" Mr. Wycherly said quietly. "Take off that wet macintosh; look what a pool it's making. Get up, you poor, silly child; there, that's better —now come and sit on my knee and tell me exactly what happened."

Jane-Anne flung herself upon Mr. Wycherly, buried her wet face in his neck and sobbed out:

"I read *Punch* on the top of the baby."

At this most unexpected revelation Mr. Wycherly fairly jumped.

"You mean you sat on the baby?" he cried aghast.

"No, it was *Punch* sat on the baby and it didn't like it. It yelled."

"Do explain—your statements are so confused —what *do* you mean?"

"I mean," she continued, "I opened *Punch on* the baby and read it—it was only a minute, but I

was so interested, and I've heard them say that it doesn't hurt to let a healthy baby cry for a minute—and all the nurses read, I've seen them hundreds of times; but they heard and came flying all in a hurry and *were* so cross, and Mrs. Cox said I needn't ever come back."

It was well that Jane-Anne couldn't see Mr. Wycherly's face, which was lighted up by a smile of immense satisfaction; but what he *said* sounded very grave.

"I fear you have not been very honest, little Jane-Anne."

She sat up and looked at him.

"Honest! I've told you exactly what happened."

"Certainly, you've been honest to me, but what about Mrs. Cox?"

Jane-Anne hung her head.

"The baby slept at first," she said, "and it was so dull and all the *Punches* were there—and I got so interested——"

"You've not done what you undertook to do, that was to look after the baby. Mrs. Cox didn't ask you there to read her *Punches*, did she?"

"She'll never have me again, she said so."

"I'm not surprised."

"What will Mrs. Methuen say?"

"I can't think."

"And aunt?"

"I don't think your—aunt" (Mr. Wycherly was just going to say "excellent," but restrained himself) "will be much surprised."

Jane-Anne sighed deeply. "I shall never be a

Norland Nurse now," she said sadly. "I've lost my character."

"I'm afraid you have."

"Do *you* mind very much?"

"Upon my soul," said Mr. Wycherly, "I don't care a brass farthing."

CHAPTER XV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY

"The foundation of beauty is a reasonable order addressed to the imagination through the senses."—PHILEBUS.

THE last time Mrs. Methuen called in Holywell, just before she went away, she left a ladies' paper, *The Peeress*.

Jane-Anne fell upon it instantly and carried it off to her room. She had never seen such a paper before, and her mind was in a curiously receptive state. Lord Byron's Hebrew melodies rang in her ears, and she immensely enjoyed herself when she went to bed at night by standing in front of the looking-glass in her nightgown, with her thick black hair streaming round her like a cloud while she repeated solemnly:—

"She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes,
Thus mellowed to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies."

She quite agreed with the poet that "gaudy day" was a little unkind to her appearance. She was too brown; moreover, she was no longer pale, and this rather vexed her. She had an idea

that Lord Byron would have preferred her pale. Still she felt that her hair was quite satisfactory, and shook it round her, only grieving that the glass was far too small to show it all. There was not a cheval-glass in Mr. Wycherly's house. But from time to time she caught sight of her big plait (Mrs. Methuen had persuaded Mrs. Dew to have Jane-Anne's hair done in one thick plait instead of two) in shop windows, with the profoundest satisfaction.

"One shade the more, one ray the less."

She hoped she had rays in her hair, but was not quite sure.

"Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place."

To obtain the "thoughts serenely sweet" it was but necessary to adopt the Bruey pose, and, behold, the thing was done.

Mere words cannot express the comfort that poem was to Jane-Anne. Up and down her room she sailed, "clothed on in majesty," an unbleached calico nightgown, and her long black hair.

"The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent."

At such moments she adored Lord Byron for writing such beautiful things about her, and was perfectly happy.

W.W.

Mrs. Methuen's magazine opened up new possibilities. From its pages she learned that no one need despair of their personal appearance. Had nature been niggardly in the matter of hair, a hundred artists in *coiffure* advertised their aid. Was one's complexion not quite to one's liking, there were skin specialists galore who undertook to remedy any facial defects. In fact the journal was a regular *vade mecum* as to the cult of beauty, and such pleasing visions were not conjured up by words alone. There were pictures in plenty of lovely ladies in every stage of lack of attire and with every variety of "transformation." Radiant beings with enormous eyes, preternaturally minute mouths, and figures so slender that one wondered if they ever had anything to eat.

And every one of them had wavy hair.

Now Jane-Anne's hair waved just after it was unplaited, but it was naturally quite straight, soft, fine, abundant hair, growing very prettily round her face with an upward sweep from her forehead.

It was all very well to walk in beauty like the night. It was comparatively easy to imagine one realised Lord Byron's conception of the Hebrew beauty. But here much more was expected.

Jane-Anne was certainly slim—the unkindly accurate might have described her as decidedly thin; but, even so, she was not shaped at all like the ladies depicted in *The Peeress*. Her legs were long and her hips were small, but—"I seem too thick through," she said to herself.

There was a whole page of replies to anxious students of the Art of Beauty. "Pietista" sought to improve a throat "discoloured and too thin." "Butterfly" complained of "sagging lines beneath chin and around mouth."

Jane-Anne flew to the glass but could discover nothing of the kind, and was comforted.

"Troubled" wanted to know how to "colour dark hair a bright auburn," but Jane-Anne passed this by. She was perfectly satisfied with the colour of her hair. What she did long for was a box of "Magnolia Bloom powder," which *The Peeress* assured "Amabelle" would lend to the countenance "the soft sheen of a butterfly's wing."

But this desirable appearance could only be arrived at by the expenditure of eighteenpence, and Jane-Anne possessed but three-halfpence in the world. The other beautifiers cost such vast sums as excluded them altogether from her scheme of possibilities.

Eighteenpence: one shilling and sixpence. Once Lord Dursley had given her a new two-shilling bit and her aunt allowed her to keep it. But, alas! it was spent long ago, and Lord Dursley was not very likely to come to Oxford that summer.

She would consult Mr. Wycherly. She had infinite faith in his sympathy, his wisdom, and his resource. She would show him this enchanting journal and see what he thought of it. Perhaps he, who read so many books, was already familiar with its pages.

She carried it with her when she went to bid him good-night. It had become an established custom for Jane-Anne to bid him good-night at considerable length.

"Have you ever read *The Peeress*, sir?" she asked, laying it on his table on the top of an open book.

"Never," said Mr. Wycherly. "Is this the lady?" He opened it, turned the pages somewhat hastily, and actually blushed.

"My dear child!" he exclaimed, "where did you get hold of this extremely shameless production?"

"Mrs. Methuen always takes it, sir; it's a ladies' paper. She left this number here."

"Mrs. Methuen, that refined and charming young lady! Surely, my dear, you are mistaken."

"No, sir, really. Lots of ladies always read it, aunt said so. I wanted to take it back to her lest she should want it, but aunt says she gets it every week, and she didn't think it mattered."

"That being the case," Mr. Wycherly remarked, hastily shutting the magazine, "it is evidently not intended for me, and you had better take it away."

"Oh, sir," Jane-Anne pleaded, "do look at the pictures. They're such beautiful ladies."

But Mr. Wycherly steadfastly averted his gaze from the offending magazine, exclaiming:

"Beautiful! My dear child, how can you apply that dignified and really expressive adjective to anything so dreadful? Have you ever seen any human being who in the least resembled

the extremely indelicate creatures depicted in this paper?"

"No, sir, but I'd like to. They've all got such curly hair."

"Most of them," Mr. Wycherly said severely, "appear to wear very little else." We must show you some really beautiful pictures, Jane-Anne, and then perhaps you will realise the worthlessness of these."

She felt that it was an unpropitious moment for the introduction of "Magnolia Bloom toilet powder." Mr. Wycherly's attitude was strangely unsympathetic. Nevertheless she was full of tenacity of purpose, so she said, in what she was assured Bruey would have considered a "winning" voice:

"Please, sir, is there anything I could do to earn one-and-six?"

Mr. Wycherly laughed. "I think you have earned it many times over by all the things you do for me. Would you like it now?"

He took a handful of silver from his pocket and pushed the coins toward her, saying:

"I wish they were new ones. I always think all the new silver ought to be kept for boys and girls—but if you're in a hurry—perhaps you'd rather have it now."

"Thank you very much, sir," said Jane-Anne; but her voice was not joyful, as one might have expected.

She felt rather uncomfortable.

He had never questioned her as to why she wanted it.

"Are you sure it's enough?" he asked, kindly.

"Quite sure, sir, and I'm very much obliged."

Mr. Wycherly looked at her curiously. Why was her voice so listless and flat?

She dropped the coins into the pocket of her dress and stood before him, rubbing one slender foot over the other, her eyes downcast, quite unlike the eager, chattering child he loved.

"Good-night, sir," said Jane-Anne.

When she reached her bedroom she felt very miserable indeed. She possessed the coveted eighteenpence and was thoroughly ashamed of having it. It had been obtained too easily, and she felt that she was deceiving Mr. Wycherly. Without knowing why, she was certain he would not wholly approve of the purchase of the "Magnolia Bloom powder," and he had never asked her why she wanted the eighteenpence. He trusted her.

Jane-Anne felt mean.

Against her will, the verses she loved returned to her mind:

> "The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
> But tell of days in goodness spent."

Hitherto she had happily considered those lines quite applicable to her general conduct. Even the disastrous morning at Mrs. Cox's had not left behind it the uncomfortable sensations she was now enduring.

She had not been six years in Mrs. Dew's charge without acquiring something of that good woman's sturdy independence.

She had asked for money.

She had taken it; and for a purpose she was certain the donor would disapprove.

He would call it "meretricious," that curious word Master Montagu had used. She had heard Mr. Wycherly use it too..

> "A mind at peace with all below,
> A heart where love is innocent!"

Should she go back and tell Mr. Wycherly why she wanted the money and let him decide? Then once more might she "walk in beauty like the night" with her hair all round her and a light heart.

But he would be certain to advise her not to buy the "Magnolia Bloom." He wouldn't forbid it. That was not his way. But he would make it impossible for her to go and buy it—and she wanted it so dreadfully.

Perhaps when he saw how lovely she looked with a face that was no longer brown but purest white "with the soft sheen of a butterfly's wing" he would be glad she was so much improved.

Jane-Anne knelt down and said her prayers and added at the end the following petition:

"And please, dear Lord, let him admire me very much when I'm all over 'Magnolia Bloom.'"

Mrs. Dew came to take away the candle, but the room was quite light, for a big yellow moon was shining straight in.

Now was the moment when Jane-Anne usually arose and walked in beauty, repeating the poem the while.

Instead, she lay quite still. She felt she had no right to that poem; Lord Byron had not written it for her.

Why did she feel so certain that he, too, would have disapproved of the "Magnolia Bloom"?

Jane-Anne cried herself to sleep.

* * * *

Next day she went to the largest hairdresser's in Oxford, and presented herself timidly at a counter laden with all sorts of pots and boxes and bottles.

She asked for the "Magnolia Bloom" in a weak and trembling voice, and was relieved to find they had it.

"Which shade will you have?" asked the young lady behind the counter.

"Oh, the very whitest, please!" exclaimed Jane-Anne.

"D'you want a puff, miss?" asked the attendant.

Jane-Anne had never thought of a puff. She shook her head sadly. Judging by the price of the other things, no puff could be obtained for three halfpence, which was all the money she had.

She hurried from the shop.

How expensive it was to be beautiful!

She knew what a puff was, for she had been permitted to assist at and to admire the bathing of Mrs. Methuen's baby, and she had seen the nurse powder him. She was nothing if not resourceful. She went to the nearest jeweller and bought a pennyworth of cotton wool, and armed with what *The Peeress* called these "aids to beauty," she returned to Holywell in a flutter of excitement.

Anxious as she was to try the beautifying effect of the "Magnolia Bloom," she felt some diffidence in presenting herself before her aunt thus embellished, so she waited until she had taken in Mr. Wycherly's tea and had her own.

It was Mr. Wycherly's pleasant custom to keep her for half an hour or so when she went in to take away his tea. They talked about Greece, and she had learned to read some of the simple words. She learned the alphabet in two evenings, and astonished Mr. Wycherly by her quickness and receptivity.

She stood in front of her looking-glass that evening and, with hands that trembled with excitement, applied the "Magnolia Bloom" to her little brown face.

It never occurred to Jane-Anne that the way to use powder was to put it on and take it off again. That would have appeared to her a wasteful work of supererogation. She liberally bedaubed her face with the "snow-white" powder and anxiously regarded the result.

Her eyes looked very dark and large, and her eyebrows, what she had left of them, very black. It had rather an ageing effect on the whole, for so liberal had she been with the powder that her hair all round the temples was iron grey.

She was not quite sure whether she liked the effect or not. Even to her own prejudiced eyes it was a trifle *bizarre* and pronounced.

Where was the soft sheen of the butterfly's wing promised to "Amabelle"?

"Perhaps it looks different to other people," she reflected.

She crept to the foot of the stairs and listened. Yes, her aunt was safely in the kitchen. She darted through the housekeeper's room and upstairs to Mr. Wycherly's door, and went in.

He looked up from the letter he was writing with his usual kindly smile of welcome, then suddenly he laughed.

"My dear Jane-Anne," he exclaimed, "have you been baking?"

Jane-Anne stood still in the middle of the room and hung her head.

"It's Magnolia Bloom," she mumbled.

"It's what?" Mr. Wycherly demanded.

"Magnolia Bloom," she repeated, her cheeks very hot indeed beneath the powder.

"Is that some new kind of flour?" asked Mr. Wycherly, "and if so why in the world do you not wash your face?"

"It's not flour, sir, it's powder—face powder—to make one white and pretty? Don't you like it?"

Mr. Wycherly sat back in his chair gazing in speechless wonder at Jane-Anne. That a girl who admired Lord Byron's poetry, who could learn the Greek alphabet in two evenings, who showed a real appreciation of what was noble and uplifting in the history of her country, could make such an absolute guy of herself in all good faith was to him quite incomprehensible. Boys did not do these things. He was fairly nonplussed.

"Where did you get this—ahem—bloom?" he asked quietly.

"I bought it, sir, with that eighteenpence."

"Have you much more of it?"

"Oh, yes, sir, a whole box."

"Please bring it, and you shall similarly adorn me and see how I look."

Jane-Anne was puzzled. He certainly had not admired her, but then, again, he had not condemned, and he wanted some himself. Swiftly and softly as a panther (lest she should meet her aunt) she fetched the powder and the screw of cotton wool from her room.

"Now," said Mr. Wycherly, "do me."

Jane-Anne made a dreadful mess. All over his coat, his chair (even the writing-table did not escape), fell the "Magnolia Bloom."

"What a very disagreeable smell the stuff has got," said Mr. Wycherly, and sneezed. He hated common scents.

At this psychological moment, when they were both smothered in powder and clouds of it were in the air, Mrs. Dew opened the study door, announcing—

"Mr. Gloag, sir."

Jane-Anne started violently and upset the box, and the visitor announced came into the room.

He was tall and young, with a keen, clean-shaven face, merry dark eyes, and dark curly hair worn a thought longer than is usual with young men.

He stopped short on the threshold, for really the pair before him presented a most extraordinary appearance.

Mr. Wycherly leapt to his feet, exclaiming:

"Curly, my dear fellow, I am delighted to see you." He had quite forgotten the "Magnolia Bloom" in his pleasure at beholding an old friend.

"Am I interrupting a rehearsal, or what?" the young man asked, as he shook hands warmly.

Mr. Wycherly sneezed again. "Oh, this abominable powder; I had forgotten it for the moment. Now, Curly, you are an actor; you are familiar with make-up in every shape and form. Will you kindly tell this young lady whether you consider us improved by this whitewash?"

The situation jumped to the eye. The young man laughed.

"You are both of you rather new to the use of powder, I should say; no one ever leaves it on, you know."

"Then what on earth is the use of it?" demanded Mr. Wycherly.

"It has, perhaps, a softening effect, but it is never used in such quantities."

"Go and wash, Jane-Anne," said Mr. Wycherly, "and I must do the same, then ask Mrs. Dew—no, come yourself with a dustpan and brush and clear up as well as you can. Curly will go downstairs."

In absolute silence Jane-Anne did as she was bid. It took a long time to clean Mr. Wycherly's study. There seemed a great deal of "Magnolia Bloom" for eighteenpence when she had finished. She emptied the dustpan into the dustbin, then she went and fetched *The Peeress*. Mrs. Dew had gone out to get something extra for dinner, as the gentleman was going to stay, so

Jane-Anne had the kitchen to herself. She tore *The Peeress* across and across and thrust it down into the hottest part of the fire, putting more coal on the top of it lest her aunt should see it and wonder.

"There," said Jane-Anne, poking viciously. "You're a horrid, meretricious, lying old thing, that you are."

CHAPTER XVI

THE PURSUIT CONTINUED

"For beauty draws us by a single hair."—POPE.

JANE-ANNE waited at dinner that night, and the stranger with the dark, vivacious eyes looked at her curiously more than once. When she had set the port in front of Mr. Wycherly and left the room finally, this guest, whom he called "Curly," leant forward, saying:

"So that is the new ward?"

"If you like to call her so."

"She is not an ordinary girl."

"I fear not."

"Why fear?"

"Because she will be very hard to place safely."

"My own impression is," Curly said slowly, "that she will need no placing at all; she will arrange matters for herself."

"You mean she will marry while quite young."

"Not at all. I should say she is quite unlikely to marry very young, but she will find a niche for herself, and she won't follow any beaten track either."

"When she came first of all," said Mr. Wycherly, "it was understood that she was to be trained for a servant; the doctor vetoed that—

said she would never be strong enough. Then a charming lady here suggested having her trained as some very superior sort of nurse—children's nurse, but I question whether her genius lies in that direction. Personally, I can think of nothing very suitable for Jane-Anne except to delight me and get strong; but of course one must be practical. She is extraordinarily receptive. She takes pleasure in every kind of beauty, and she is quite singularly susceptible to beautiful verse. You should hear her recite Byron's 'Isles of Greece.'"

"Why shouldn't I hear her? Get her in and ask her to do it, then, perhaps, I can throw some light on this dark question."

"I can't say that I think she would be shy," Mr. Wycherly said, dubiously, "for shyness and Jane-Anne seem quite foreign to one another; but—whether it would be good for her——"

"I'd like to hear her awfully," said Curly persuasively. "A housekeeper's niece, not thirteen, and steeped in Byron sounds such a delightful anachronism. Moreover, a little girl brought up by you. Please let me."

There was something very wheedling about Curly as he rose and went to the bell.

Mr. Wycherly nodded, and he rang.

Mrs. Dew thought it was for coffee, and that they were in a great hurry. However, she made it quickly and sent Jane-Anne in with it.

"This gentleman," said Mr. Wycherly, as she set down the coffee in front of him, "is fond of poetry, and I wonder if you would repeat to him your favourite verses about Marathon?"

Jane-Anne looked quickly from one to the other. She stepped back a little from the table and held up one slender brown hand as if adjuring them to listen.

Curly leant his elbow on the table and his head on his hand, and sat still as a statue, his brilliant eyes fixed on Jane-Anne.

She had a musical voice and a singularly clear enunciation. She no longer mispronounced any words, for Mr. Wycherly had heard her say the poem many times and took care of that. There was, withal, a curious little foreign distinctness in the way she separated one word from another that was undoubtedly a reminiscence of her father. She was never monotonous and she never ranted; best of all, she was utterly unconscious of herself and absolutely wholehearted in her lament for her country, and there was real passion in her young voice as she declaimed:

> "A land of slaves shall ne'er be mine—
> Dash down yon cup of Samian wine!"

No one spoke for a minute, then very gravely and courteously Curly said, "Thank you."

Jane-Anne turned to go, and Mr. Wycherly rose and opened the door for her. She looked up at him as she went out, with timid questioning eyes.

"It was beautiful, my child, quite beautiful," he said.

Jane-Anne went back to the kitchen to wash dishes, perfectly happy.

Curly waited till Mr. Wycherly sat down again.

"And so you wonder what that child will be?" he asked.

"I do, indeed," sighed Mr. Wycherly.

"And she, with those great eyes set so wide apart?"

"That," said Mr. Wycherly, "is the Greek type."

"Every great actress," Curly said sententiously, "has her eyes set wide apart. There has never been a ferrety-faced actress worth anything."

"But what has that got to do with Jane-Anne?" Mr. Wycherly said in a puzzled voice.

Curly laughed. "I shan't tell you," he said. "Only I know what she will be, and you needn't worry or try to stop it, for you can't."

"I hope she will be nothing of the kind," Mr. Wycherly said hotly. "Poor little nymph, so sensitive, so loving-hearted, so wise, and at times, so amazingly silly."

"They are like that," said Curly.

* * * *

Next morning Mr. Wycherly told Jane-Anne that the friend who had dined with him the night before was an actor, and that the company he was in was performing *As You Like It* that afternoon in a ducal garden not very far from Oxford; and finally that he was going to take her to see it.

That day was one long *festa* for Jane-Anne. First of all came the drive, sitting side by side with Mr. Wycherly in a hired victoria. She wore her best summer frock and hat, beautiful white

garments chosen by Mrs. Methuen, that filled her soul with rapture every time she put them on; white cotton gloves that Mrs. Dew had washed that morning, thin black stockings, and the light shoes Mr. Wycherly had insisted upon after he had seen her dance under the apple-tree.

Mrs. Dew watched them drive away with great pride.

"I will say this," she said to her friend, Miss Morecraft, that afternoon, "that when Jane-Anne's dressed you couldn't tell her from one of the gentry. She's got something about her, my sister had it, and her father—not as I ever cared for him—had it, too. I think if my sister could have seen her this afternoon she'd be set up, that I do. He's a fine-looking old gentleman, too; handsome he is, and no mistake."

A good many people regarded the quaint pair with pleasure. They were so manifestly proud and fond of each other, and the child was so radiantly happy. The crowds of well-dressed people delighted her. The garden was beautiful, the weather perfect, and with thrills of the wildest excitement she recognised Curly as Orlando.

When it was over, her first criticism was characteristic. "I'd have made a better boy than that if I'd been Rosalind; she wasn't a bit like a boy really, was she? If ever I pretended to be a boy I'd try to behave like Master Edmund, then I don't believe *anyone* would rekkernise me."

"I don't think Shakespeare meant Rosalind to be a finished actress. She is a supremely lovable

girl. I don't think we would care so much for her if we didn't realise the girl all the way through," Mr. Wycherly said thoughtfully.

"Perhaps that pretty lady was right, then," said Jane-Anne; "but somehow I *think* Rosalind would have tried to behave more like a boy."

"When you play Rosalind you shall give us a new reading of the part," Mr. Wycherly remarked carelessly.

Jane-Anne cuddled closely against him. "When I'm grown up," she said, "I shall ask that Mr. Curly to take me about acting, too. How did he begin?"

"That," Mr. Wycherly answered dreamily, "is a long story, and rather sad. No one wanted him to be anything of the kind——"

"But he *had* to!" exclaimed Jane-Anne. "He just had to, something drove him——"

"I suppose so; even yet I think it a pity."

"I don't," Jane-Anne said decidedly. "I'd rather go about being people than anything—one could never be dull."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Mr. Wycherly.

For several nights now, both Bruey and "She walks in beauty like the night" were forgotten. Jane-Anne arose, after her aunt had taken away the candle, to impersonate Rosalind. She rolled her thick plait round her head and pinned it up with hairpins stolen from her aunt's store. She achieved doublet and hose by means of two towels, several safety pins, and her long stockings. And the moon looked in at the window and was doubtless well amused.

The moon waxed and waned and the end of July was at hand.

Mr. Wycherly was plainly stirred out of his usual scholarly calm. His boys were coming home. Jane-Anne shared his excitement, and even Mrs. Dew felt it necessary to make a large cake and "to get in" quantities of stores of every description.

Jane-Anne was strung up to the highest pitch of expectation. Although she had seen comparatively little of the "young gentlemen" when she first came to Holywell, she had heard about them so much and so constantly from the master, that she felt she, too, owned them. There was, moreover, the delightful sense of an "understanding" with Montagu. He had asked her to look after his guardian and she had done her best. Moreover, quick and sympathetic always, she early realised that not even the Greek Myths were so entrancing a subject to Mr. Wycherly as these two boys of his, and during their walks together she invariably led the conversation in their direction, and found it an easy and fascinating path.

At last the great day came. The boys were to meet in London and come down together to Oxford by a train getting in just before tea.

At the last moment Mr. Wycherly bade Jane-Anne come with him to the station.

She was pale with excitement and could hardly speak.

When at last the train came in and the boys, brown and jolly and full of rejoicing at getting home, jumped on to the platform, and the first

exciting greetings had passed, Jane-Anne suddenly flung her arms round Edmund's neck and burst into tears upon his shoulder.

Edmund looked across the weeping damsel at his guardian in comical dismay. "I say," he exclaimed. "If she does this when she meets me, whatever will she do when we go away?"

"I beg your pardon, Master Edmund," sobbed Jane-Anne, hastily withdrawing her arms, "but we have wanted it so, and now it's come."

"Well, that's nothing to cry for," Montagu said, patting her back consolingly. "Cheer up."

Jane-Anne dried her eyes, and the four went home in a cab laden with luggage.

The next few days drove Mrs. Dew almost to desperation. It was impossible to make Jane-Anne "keep herself to herself," as that good woman considered decorous and desirable.

Wherever the young gentlemen were, there was Jane-Anne, and it wasn't altogether her own fault. They sought her out. She fielded at impromptu cricket matches, and discussed high subjects with Montagu. She proudly displayed her knowledge of the Greek alphabet, and assisted to stick in stamps in a long-neglected album. She even confided to the boys her misfortune with the "Magnolia Bloom," nor was she wholly crushed by their scorn for her silliness. *Apropos* of this, one day, she said:

"I wouldn't mind so much being brown if only I had curly hair."

"The Greeks always had curly hair," Montagu announced authoritatively. "I can't think why

you've been left out, 'ribbed and rippled like the wet sea-sand,'" he quoted.

"I wonder," Edmund remarked, with a gravity that would have warned a wiser person, "that you never wash it in beer, then it would curl like anything."

"*Would* it?" exclaimed Jane-Anne, in great excitement. "Is that why yours is so curly?"

Edmund winked at Montagu, who grinned appreciatively. "Of course it is," he cried; "all our chaps wash their heads in beer every Saturday, that's why we've all got such ripping hair. Look at it." And Edmund thrust his head under Jane-Anne's nose.

She ran her hand gently over the short, fair hair that was indeed "ribbed and rippled like the wet sea-sand," then she sniffed delicately, remarking: "I wonder it doesn't smell of it."

"Oh, the smell soon goes off," Edmund answered airily.

"Why don't you do it?" she asked Montagu. "Your hair's as straight as mine."

"He's too slack," Edmund remarked.

"Oh, I can't be bothered," Montagu said carelessly; "I don't *want* curly hair. If I did I should wash it in beer."

At that moment Mr. Wycherly called the boys to go out with him, and they rushed off leaving Jane-Anne to digest this seemingly simple specific for curly hair.

Reflection unfollowed by action was impossible to Jane-Anne.

The beds were made. Her share of the dusting

was done. The boys and Mr. Wycherley would be out until luncheon, and her aunt was busy in the kitchen where she strongly objected to have Jane-Anne, as she described it, "clutterin' round."

There was a large cask of beer in the cellar, and the key was in the door. The cellar was to the front of the house under the dining-room, and was consequently some distance from the kitchen.

Jane-Anne rushed upstairs, seized her large bedroom jug, emptied it, and descended with it to the cellar.

The cask was near the steps, and, with the door at the top left open, she could see quite well. She turned the tap and the good brown ale foamed gaily into the jug.

Just as, by its weight, she judged it to be about half full, she heard a sound as though her aunt were coming.

She seized her jug and rushed up the steps, forgetting to shut the door at the top, and hid in the parlour. No, she was wrong, Mrs. Dew was still busy in the kitchen.

As quietly as she could, she crept back to her room, and, once there, bolted the door.

Her heart was thumping in her ears, and she panted with excitement.

She had a good large basin in her room and a foot-bath. She chose the foot-bath and what was in the jug filled it half full of the strong brown ale of Oxford.

What a smell it had!

Jane-Anne knelt down, unplaited her hair and shook it forward over her face. She held her

nose tightly with one hand and with the other plunged her heavy mane into the foaming beer. The smell was overpowering. She was obliged to let go of her nose for she was choking, and as she did so the beer, forced higher in the footbath by the mass of hair, splashed her in the face.

Gasping and choking, she persevered; she laved her head with beer, she rubbed it in with both hands, rejoicing that it made a beautiful lather, and she spat out vigorously what had been forced into her open mouth while she held her nose.

It was a horrible experience, but the blood of the Spartans ran in Jane-Anne's veins, and she endured till every hair and a large proportion of her upper garments was thoroughly saturated with beer.

At last she felt the treatment had had full justice, and she drew out what appeared to be yards of sticky, sodden pulp that had once been human hair.

"Of course it won't curl till it's dry," she said to herself, and proceeded to sprinkle more beer about her bedroom in her efforts to free her hair from that nourishing beverage.

But it wouldn't dry.

Her bedroom already smelt like ten public-houses rolled into one, and brown stains were everywhere.

Not a ripple nor a rib appeared on her matted and bedraggled head.

Her towels were already saturated with beer, and only seemed to make matters worse.

Her eyes smarted and her nose was scarlet. The strong smell made her feel quite faint.

She began to cry bitterly; her hair was stickier than ever and showed no signs of even waving.

In her ardent pursuit of beauty she had forgotten that explanation would be necessary, and what explanation would be possible in the face of all these stains and this terrific smell? She hung her head out of the window and it dripped into the stone-cutter's yard.

A man passed underneath, sniffed, and looked up; all he saw was a wet mass of something that dripped beer. "Waste o' good liquor," he muttered, and passed on.

Jane-Anne was getting desperate when there came a rattling of the handle of her door, a hasty push against it, then a tremendous knocking and Edmund's voice:

"Are you there, Jane-Anne?"

"Yes," in a muffled sniff.

"What are you doing? Come out."

"I can't."

"Well, let me in, then. I want to speak to you."

"I daren't."

"Oh, nonsense, let me in quick, I say, I've something important to tell you."

Curiosity was too strong in her to resist this. She opened the door, hiding herself behind it as she did so.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Edmund "It's here, too."

Then, as he saw the foot-bath on the floor, the beery stains everywhere, and lastly, the distracted figure behind the door shrouded in sticky locks that still dripped beer, he subsided upon the bed in fits of laughter.

Jane-Anne banged the door, bolted it, and faced him indignantly.

"Why are you laughing?" she demanded.

"You've never gone and done it really—well, you *are* the simplest juggins."

"D'you mean," Jane-Anne demanded, sternly, "that it *doesn't* make hair curl?"

"Not that I know of," gurgled the perjured boy; "it may," and relapsing into howls of mirth he buried his face in her pillow to stifle them.

Jane-Anne clasped her beery hands and wrung them: "And I've endured all this for nothing," she cried indignantly.

"And wasted a whole cask of beer," Edmund continued. "You left it running, and the cellar's flooded and you can smell us half-way down the street; there's quite a little crowd outside," he announced gleefully.

"I wish I was dead," she moaned.

"I'd have a bath if I were you, quick," said Edmund. "If you're safe in there, locked in, no one can get at you. Mrs. Dew and Montagu and Guardie are all at the cellar. Montagu's wading about in it, scooping it up, and I want to go too, only I thought it would be mean not to fetch you——"

"You can't be meaner than you've been

already," she cried angrily. "Why did you tell me such a lie?"

"Nonsense like that isn't lies," Edmund answered, angry in his turn. "It's chaff. I never dreamt you'd be such a fool as to go and *do* it."

"Is it really no use?" she pleaded, still clinging fondly even yet to the hope that all might not have been in vain.

Edmund looked at her and began to laugh again.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PHILOSOPHY OF EFFORT

"A man's fortunes are the fruits of his character."—RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

WHEN one has passed fifty, four years—provided no one of them brings severe illness or great sorrow—make little if any difference in outward appearance. Time is usually kind to the middle-aged, and it is only when we reach middle-age ourselves, and the dear old landmarks are removed one by one, that we realise how much we unconsciously depended on this stability of appearance, this changelessness in those who helped to shape our destiny.

Thus if there was little change in Mrs. Dew and Mr. Wycherly four years after Jane-Anne had flooded the Holywell cellar with beer, Jane-Anne herself and the boys looked back upon the children of that time with a kind of affectionate scorn.

Montagu was now taller than Mr. Wycherly, thin-faced and analytic as ever, only waiting for the following October to take up his scholarship at New College.

Edmund was on the *Britannia*, all uniform and gold buttons, naval phrases and nonsense.

When he appeared for his "leaves" (he scorned to call it holidays) he imported so much liveliness and laughter, to say nothing of visitors from the outer world, into the quiet household that during these hilarious weeks Jane-Anne forgot to be earnest.

For Jane-Anne was very earnest.

Four years of school-life had wrought great changes in Jane-Anne.

For one thing, no one any longer had to worry about her lungs. Crepitations were things of the past. She was strong as a Shetland pony with fully as much endurance.

There was nothing in her physique to prevent her becoming a most efficient housemaid. Moreover, she was tall enough for even the most exacting situation. But even Mrs. Dew had ceased to include that idea among practical politics.

For Jane-Anne had turned out "clever at her books" beyond all expectation. She went first of all to a nice school over Magdalen Bridge, but she got on so fast and was so unusually receptive a pupil that the head mistress herself called upon Mr. Wycherly and suggested that Jane-Anne should go on to the High School. Mr. Wycherly consulted Lord Dursley, who still continued to take a vicarious sort of interest in the child, and the matter was arranged without much difficulty.

Here Jane-Anne fell under the influence of Miss Willows and became strenuous and earnest to the last degree.

Miss Willows taught the top form, and she did more than teach it, she moulded it.

She was twenty-eight years old and was fully determined to be a head mistress herself before many years had passed. She was of the stuff head mistresses are made and she was modern of the moderns. She was tall and strong and handsome, good at games and a first in classics, and hers was indeed the doctrine of perfection.

"Don't only try to do things as well as other people," she would say; "try to do them a little better. Never be content with mediocrity."

Courage and strength were her watchwords, and her ambition was that her girls should go forth into the world not to be shielded from temptation but armed to withstand it. Silliness she abhorred, and, satisfactory pupil as Jane-Anne was, she was thankful that Miss Willows could not, as she put it, "see inside her," for Jane-Anne was conscious that she frequently lapsed from grace, was often frankly and unashamedly silly and enjoyed it.

Miss Willows was always beautifully dressed, and taught her girls to care a good deal about their clothes. She was sarcastic, and the clumsy and untidy trembled before her.

Jane-Anne never trembled. She admired and adored and perhaps "inside" she was a little afraid of her, but outwardly she was quite fearless, and Miss Willows respected her in consequence. Even more did she respect the girl's quite extraordinary command of English and her familiarity with schools of philosophy that were to most of the class mere names.

Miss Willows had settled Jane-Anne's career.

She was to go on to one of the women's colleges and then she was to teach. It was her plain duty. Jane-Anne said nothing, seemed to acquiesce in all these wise and benevolent plans on her behalf, and all the time dreamed dreams and saw visions of something very different indeed.

She had not wavered in her allegiance to Lord Byron. He was still her hero, and she stoutly refused to displace him by Mr. Robert Browning, who was the chosen prophet of Miss Willows.

"Lord Byron is so obvious," that lady said one day, when she had found fault with a quotation from "Childe Harold" that Jane-Anne had dragged into an essay.

"It is impossible to misunderstand what he means," Jane-Anne said quickly, ever ready to take up arms on behalf of "her oldest friend," as she called him.

"He is not subtle," Miss Willows continued.

"He is never obscure, never unmusical," quoth Jane-Anne.

"I am sorry," Miss Willows said gravely, "that you make such a hero of Lord Byron, the more so, that, from what I can make out, you do not do so in ignorance of his character. You say you have read his life?"

"Years ago."

Miss Willows made a point of never being shocked at anything her girls might say—to be shocked showed weakness. Nevertheless, she rather wondered what Mr. Wycherly could have been about to allow such a thing. And there was a black mark against him in her mind.

Curiously enough, it was Mr. Wycherly himself who first roused Jane-Anne to any enthusiasm for the works of Robert Browning, and it came about in this way.

She still passionately desired curly hair. It was the desire of the moth for the star, for her hair remained obstinately straight. That it was beautiful in colour, texture and abundance, did not comfort her; it was straight, uncompromisingly straight, though it maintained its upward, outward sweep round her broad, low forehead.

Mr. Wycherly thought it was hard for Jane-Anne to have no money, and insisted on paying her five shillings a month for waiting upon him. Out of this, her aunt insisted that she must keep herself in stockings and gloves, which the child faithfully did.

But a girl at school enlightened her as to the uses of curling tongs, and Jane-Anne succumbed to temptation. She borrowed the goffering irons, heated them in the kitchen fire and burnt both her hair and her forehead rather badly.

Mr. Wycherly was infinitely more distressed about this than over the beer episode, and took her gently to task for trying to improve upon what Nature had already made so harmonious and pleasing to the eye.

That was the way to get at Jane-Anne. As always, she was perfectly frank with him.

"Miss Willows says it is the duty of everyone to look as pretty as possible. 'Do your best and then think nothing more about it,' she says.

But I seem obliged to think about it. You see, I *know* I'd be so much nicer if my hair was frizzy.'

"But I don't think you would," Mr. Wycherly argued. "Your type is severe and classical; 'frizziness' would be quite dreadful and incongruous."

"But could *anyone* be beautiful with straight hair?"

"Why not?"

"Lord Byron had wavy hair, *you* have wavy hair, all the goddesses and people and Helen of Troy had wavy hair."

"I assure you," Mr. Wycherly declared, absently passing a long, slender hand over his thick white locks, "I never think about my hair at all, except when I have to go and get it cut."

"You never think about it, my dear, because you are so sure it is all right. You *know* you are a most beautiful old person and that people must admire you if they looked at you at all, *therefore* you can afford not to think about it."

"My dear Jane-Anne, you are talking nonsense."

"I'm not; really, truly, not. I often see people look at you in the street and I often hear them say nice things——"

"Good heavens," cried Mr. Wycherly, "how dreadful!"

"I shouldn't think it a bit dreadful if they said such things about me," Jane-Anne said, "but they don't yet—not often."

"Do they ever?" Mr. Wycherly asked anxiously.

"If I told you, you would say it was impertinent, so I won't tell you, dear master."

"Will you promise me to let your hair alone?"

"If I promise, I should have to," Jane-Anne said doubtfully.

"That's why I want you to promise."

"Will a year do?" pleaded Jane-Anne.

"Three years," Mr. Wycherly maintained.

Jane-Anne sighed deeply. "Well, I promise —but if at the end of that time I find something that will really truly make it curl, without smelling horrible or burning or spoiling it——"

"Three years will do," said Mr. Wycherly.

That evening when she went to say good-night to him he read her "A Face," by Robert Browning.

> "If one could have that little head of hers
> Painted upon a background of pure gold. . . ."

Jane-Anne listened, breathless, charmed. When he had finished he turned to her:

"That always makes me think of you, and I wish I could have you painted so. But you wouldn't be a bit like it if you had different hair."

Jane-Anne was silent for nearly two minutes; then she said thoughtfully:

"I rather like Browning's poetry after all. I'll quote a bit in my next scripture just to please Miss Willows."

At first her position in the school was something of an anomaly. Her exceptional ability and her fleetness of foot gave her an assured

place in the school work and games at once. Her personal appearance and her eager charm brought her friends. Then one of the girls, who had asked her to tea, a girl living in a large house in the Woodstock Road, whose people had nothing whatever to do with any of the colleges, discovered that she was no relation to the old gentleman in whose house she lived and that her aunt was his servant.

The girl was horrified, told every girl she could get to listen, and always concluded the harangue with the remark: "We all know the school's mixed enough, but it's getting a bit too much when they take the daughters of domestic servants. Someone ought to write and complain."

She forthwith cut Jane-Anne, as did several others. Jane-Anne was puzzled, then angry, and finally forced the girl to explain her conduct in the playground.

"Your aunt's his servant," the girl concluded, "and we don't like it."

"I'm his servant, too," Jane-Anne said haughtily, "and I'd rather be his servant than your friend any day."

"You won't have much chance of being that," the girl said angrily. "I wouldn't be seen with you for the world."

"The whole of Oxford," cried Jane-Anne "can see me with him, and he's a great gentleman and a scholar; and you—you're a carroty haired, ill-bred little nobody who can't write a French exercise without getting somebody else to do half of it."

The school took sides, and the best and cleverest half finally sided with Jane-Anne. She never told anybody but Montagu what she had gone through, but whenever any new girl made friendly advances Jane-Anne took care to inform her that Mrs. Dew, Mr. Wycherly's housekeeper, was her aunt, that she loved her and wasn't in the least ashamed of it. "And now," she always concluded, "you can go on being friends with me or not, just as you choose."

The girls were friendly enough in school, but she knew very few of them at home. Those she did know were nearly all friends of Mrs. Methuen and girls whose position was assured. Thus it happened that Jane-Anne's few friends were the nicest girls in the school. But she had very little time for friendship. She still helped her aunt in the house as much as ever she could. She had really hard and heavy homework to prepare—only her extraordinary quickness got her through it in the time she allowed for it, and she was, moreover, always to the fore if any play or recitation or fancy dancing was toward. She was so easily and far beyond any other girl in things of that sort that she could never be spared. The dancing-class was her greatest joy. Mr. Wycherly had insisted on her learning to dance whenever she went to school. He paid the fees himself, and sometimes even braved the phalanx of girls at the class in order to go himself and see her dance.

And once a year Curly came with his company and acted in the Oxford Theatre. Mr. Wycherly

always took Jane-Anne and Curly always came to see them in Holywell, and every time he came he asked Mr. Wycherly the same question: "Well, and have you settled yet what she is to be?"

"She talks," said Mr. Wycherly, "of being a teacher of dancing—but it seems to me that in that case her education is rather thrown away."

"A teacher of dancing!" Curly repeated ironically. "I think I see her teaching dancing for long."

"She came to me last night," Mr. Wycherly continued, as though he had not heard, "and asked abruptly, 'Do you think one can serve God and dance for a living?'"

"Ah," said Curly, "that's a different thing; and what did you say, sir?"

"I fear," said Mr. Wycherly humbly, "that I made no very definite answer."

"I should like to know what you think," Curly persisted. "You consider dancing to be one of the beautiful and delightful arts?"

"I do."

"And in Jane-Anne that art finds the subtlest and most delicate expression?"

Mr. Wycherly groaned.

"Why should she not serve God as well in that way as in any other?"

"Because," said Mr. Wycherly haughtily, "I should dislike it extremely."

Curly laughed.

"I have an idea," he said, "that Miss Allegra

Stavrides will find another mode of expressing the artist that is in her."

Mr. Wycherly groaned again. "She is so young," he said; "why should she be anything at all for years and years?"

"Because," said Curly, "the race is to the swift, and the child is very fleet of foot."

"You will not, promise me you will not, say or do anything to put such an idea into her head," Mr. Wycherly pleaded.

"My dear old friend, the idea has been there for years—and it is quite possible it may come to nothing."

But though Curly spake comfortable words there was no conviction in his voice.

CHAPTER XVIII

GANTRY BILL

"Oh, why are eyes of hazel? noses Grecian!
I've lost my rest at night, my peace by day,
For want of some brown holland or venetian,
Over the way."

TOM HOOD.

OLD Holywell in Oxford town is an interesting street. Not only does every house there differ from its neighbour, but the inhabitants are just as varied.

Opposite Mr. Wycherly's was a tall, straight, grey house, which had been let as rooms to generations of undergraduates when the time came for them to "live out." Some two years before, Jane-Anne had watched these young gentlemen, as she then still called them, with the greatest interest; in fact, undergraduates as a class held for her one supreme possibility—one of them might fulfil in the flesh all she had dreamed in the spirit of Lord Byron.

She had never met one that in the least resembled her dream. They were, for the most part, broad-shouldered, brown-faced, exceedingly untidy young men, who slouched about Oxford in ancient Norfolk jackets, baggy grey flannel trousers, and slippers down at the heel. Most

of them looked in the best of health and spirits. The few who might, perhaps, be suspected of soulfulness were so plain-looking, that she dismissed them at once, they were out of the running altogether.

Montagu was good-looking in a straight-featured, quiet sort of way. Edmund was radiantly and riotously handsome. Mr. Wycherly, in Jane-Anne's opinion and that of several other people, was the most beautiful person in Oxford. Therefore she was hard to please.

After she came under the influence of Miss Willows, young men interested her no more. True to her theory that every eventuality should be met fearlessly, Miss Willows never omitted the possibility of marriage from talks with her girls. With her, they regarded it as a rather commonplace fate, that might perhaps fall to the lot of some of them. But there were many more interesting things in life than that.

Miss Willows never, by word or look, hinted to her girls that young men were dangerous, and therefore to be avoided. They were there in Oxford in large numbers, let the girls meet them in society if possible, let them judge of them dispassionately. Let there be no glamour of the forbidden about them. They might talk to them, listen to them; weigh their conversation in the balance of reason, and—she always added inwardly—"find it wanting." But she never said this; she implied it, and the girls, with youthful earnestness and scorn, finished the sentence for themselves.

Jane-Anne met no young men. Every under-

graduate at New College knew Mr. Wycherly by sight, but not one knew any more of him. At the time when Jane-Anne took an interest in them they took no sort of interest in her. Now that she was tall and straight, with frocks down to her ankles, and bright eyes that reigned influence, a good many undergraduates wished they knew Mr. Wycherly. As for Jane-Anne, she desired no notice from foolish young men. The notice she craved was larger and more impersonal, and although she was an impatient young person, she was content to wait for it. She knew that she was not wasting her time. She studied Greek dramatists with Mr. Wycherly, and read eagerly every word of his translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, laying to heart many of its maxims. She walked to and from school by herself, she went on occasional errands for Mrs. Dew, but beyond that she was rarely seen in Oxford except accompanied by Mr. Wycherly. With him she wandered in college gardens, and by the banks of the Cherwell. When the boys came back, she spent long days on the river with them, and every new dance she learned at school she danced again for "the master," and in summer always danced barefooted on the lawn.

Mr. Wycherly allowed her to do her evening work in the parlour, which was quieter than the housekeeper's room in such close proximity to Mrs. Dew. The May nights were hot, and Jane-Anne opened the window and drew back the short white curtains to let in as much air as possible. People might look in if they liked. It

mattered nothing to Jane-Anne, loftily absorbed in work for Miss Willows.

There she sat at the round rosewood table in the middle of the room, the electric light shaded and drawn low over her papers (Mr. Wycherly never allowed her to work in a bad light), her delicate Greek profile presented to every chance observer, severe, detached, an example of studious girlhood most edifying to behold.

So evidently thought the undergraduate who lived opposite. For no sooner had she turned on her light than he extinguished his and took a seat in the window, which, a little above the level of hers, commanded an excellent view of Mr. Wycherly's parlour. His watch was shared by a white bull terrier, who spent long hours sitting on the sill.

That undergraduate was a rowing man, the Eights came on in another fortnight, and in the evenings he "did a slack."

He was musical, this undergraduate, possessed a piano and a pleasing tenor voice, and sometimes after dinner, although Jane-Anne would not have dreamed of interrupting her work for one instant to listen, she was vaguely conscious that the music was agreeable, and was sorry when it ceased.

One evening, however, she did listen, for there came from the house opposite strains that were, to her, curiously familiar, a queer, old-fashioned song; and then with a little leap of the heart she recognised a poem she knew and loved. The young man opposite had evidently been well

taught, it was quite possible to hear his words. She stopped short in the middle of a complicated sentence to the effect that the aim of discipline is to produce a self-governing unit, laid down her pen, and, forgetful that the light was behind her, went to the window and leaned out.

The young man seated at the piano in the darkness of the room opposite smiled gleefully, and sang more loudly and with increased fervour :

> "By those tresses unconfined
> Woo'd by each Ægean wind;
> By those lids whose jetty fringe
> Kiss thy soft cheek's blooming tinge;
> By those soft eyes like the roe . . ."

Then followed the passionate Greek invocation with which each line of Byron's "Maid of Athens" concludes.

Miss Willows would doubtless have dismissed words and music as hackneyed and obvious. But her pupil had read the verses till she knew them by heart, feeling, as in the case of "She walks in beauty like the night," that Lord Byron had written them for her and about her; she had not heard them sung since her mother sang them to her when she was a very little child. Now in the soft spring night the once familiar strains came floating across the quiet street charged full of innocent and tender memories.

In the semi-darkness, Jane-Anne beheld a ghostly white dog, seated solemn and sedate on the window-ledge. The dog also noticed Jane-Anne, and while his master still passionately

proclaimed the fact that his heart had passed into the possession of "The Maid of Athens," the dog pricked forward his long ears, after the fashion of a bull-terrier when interested, and wagged his tail. At that instant the music ceased with a crash of chords.

"Oh, you dear!" exclaimed Jane-Anne, and went back to her work.

The singer came and sat in the window again.

"Gantry Bill," he said softly, "which of us did she call a dear?"

Gantry Bill wagged his tail again.

He hadn't the smallest doubt.

"That seemed to fetch her rather," the singer continued.

Gantry Bill evidently thought this a foolish remark, for he made no response.

"It's a shame to make such a pretty girl work so hard, ain't it, Bill?"

Here Gantry Bill was more sympathetic, and tried to lick his master's face.

"We'll try another," said that gentleman, "we'll fetch her again, won't us, Bill?"

But he sang the most passionate love songs in his repertoire, apparently to deaf ears. The little head, with it's cameo-like profile and dark wealth of hair, remained studiously bent under the shaded light. The self-governing unit had triumphed.

Her opposite neighbour might shout himself hoarse for all she cared. She wanted full marks and a "plus" for her essay.

Night after night that week from the house

opposite a tenor voice apostrophised some peerless she. But never again did Jane-Anne go to the window, and Gantry Bill laid his head sideways on his paws, his ears flopped forwards, and snored gently, while his master, at the top of his voice, proclaimed "the thousand beauties that he knew so well."

He was a patient dog, Gantry Bill. More patient than his master who, by-and-bye, gave it up as a bad job—and went out. He occasionally attended lectures, too, whither the dog could not accompany him. Then would Bill sit on the window-ledge watching the passers-by with a wise reflective air, or sleep in that pathetic abandonment of attitude habitual to the bull-terrier.

Jane-Anne sometimes crossed the street, spoke to him, caressed him, and peeped into the empty room behind—a most untidy room.

"Poor doggie," she said, one Saturday afternoon, "alone so much; would you like to come and play in our garden, Gantry Bill? It's much cooler than over here. The master's out, and you'll not bother anybody."

Gantry Bill looked at her, and evidently was tempted. In fact, a pretty girl in a white frock on a hot July afternoon is always a pleasing apparition.

Very slowly, like a stiff old gentleman, Gantry Bill arose and stood on the window-ledge. He smiled at Jane-Anne, and playfully took her hand into his mouth and mumbled it, in token of his approval.

"He's gone to the boats, he'll be hours and hours," she said. "I saw him rushing up the street in those awful little short knickerbockers, and you left all alone to mope, poor dear! Why shouldn't you have a little amusement, too?"

This appeared a sound argument. Gantry Bill dropped from the window-ledge into the street, and followed Jane-Anne across the road. Into the garden she took him by devious ways that did not challenge the observation of Mrs. Dew. She fetched him water in a pie-dish and presented him with a chocolate biscuit, then she sat down under the apple-tree to mend her stockings. But Gantry Bill hadn't come out for the afternoon to watch people mend stockings.

He spied a hockey ball lying on the path, seized it in his mouth, and galumphed heavily towards Jane-Anne, laid it at her feet, barked and made a series of short rushes at her in token that he desired to play.

"Hush," said Jane-Anne, holding up a needle in her finger and thumb, "you mustn't bark, else Aunt'll hear you and come out. What do you want?"

Another short rush, another "wouf," and an eager head, ears cocked forward, eyes beseeching Jane-Anne.

"You want me to throw it, do you?"

This was exactly what Gantry Bill did want, and for twenty minutes he kept Jane-Anne very busy indeed. Then, hot and exhausted, they both sat down under the apple-tree, and she was

permitted to mend her stocking. This was the first of many meetings.

Gantry Bill's master had no idea his dog made assignations with the young lady of the Greek profile and the long, thick pig-tail. Otherwise he would have insisted upon an introduction. She showed no signs of playing Eurydice to his Orpheus, sang he never so. None of his pals knew Mr. Wycherly, and Mr. Wycherly's friends in Oxford he did not know; and just because the thing seemed so impossible he ardently desired to meet Jane-Anne, and he had never wanted much to know any girl before. He was not a ladies' man.

After all, it was Gantry Bill who brought the thing about.

Mrs. Dew was very particular about eggs. Shop eggs she declined to use even for the "egg and bread crumb" of fish, and all eggs in Holywell came from an old woman who lived on the Iffley Road, kept large numbers of fowls, and sold her eggs to a chosen few who would fetch them.

It was one of Jane-Anne's duties to fetch eggs twice a week. It happened, however, that Mrs. Dew "ran short" one day when she particularly wanted to make an omelette for Mr. Wycherly's dinner. So after tea she sent Jane-Anne, with a shilling tucked into her glove, to bring the required eggs. Jane-Anne walked quickly and procured the eggs without adventure of any kind, carrying them in a little round basket shaped like the hilt of a single-stick.

It was hot, and on her return she walked more slowly, dreaming as she went. She held the basket rather loosely in one hand, and was quite unprepared when a heavy body bounced at her from behind and knocked her over. The basket flew from her hand, the eggs were scattered and smashed; and much startled and confused she felt two strong hands under her armpits that raised her to her feet, while a penitent voice exclaimed:

"I say, I am most awfully sorry; it's that brute of a dog. I can't think what possessed him to bounce at you like that. He's never done it before to anybody. I do *hope* you're not hurt or very frightened. Down, sir! Down, you brute! You shall have a good thrashing for this."

Jane-Anne recovered her senses to perceive that a tall young man, in a blazer and white flannel trousers had picked her up, that two other young men stood by, looking rather amused, and that Gantry Bill was cringing at her feet in evident expectation of the beating his master had promised him, while round about them the broken eggs were drawing maps upon the dusty road,

"Please don't beat him," she said, hastily settling her hat, which had been knocked over her nose. "He didn't mean to knock me down; he was only saying how-do-you-do. He's a great friend of mine, really."

"Lucky beggar," said the young man; "but I don't see why he should show his friendship in

such an inconvenient fashion. He must be a tremendous weight to knock you down like that."

The two other young men had discreetly strolled on. Jane-Anne, Gantry Bill and his master stood in the road encircled by broken eggs, and looked at one another. Jane-Anne saw a tall, broad-shouldered young man with a brown face, a very clean brown face that had once been fair. He was not handsome—his nose was too broad and his mouth too big; but he had splendid strong white teeth and merry blue eyes, which, at that moment, looked into her own full of contrition and commiseration.

"I think," he added hastily, "that we are neighbours; don't you live opposite?"

"That's how I knew your dog," Jane-Anne explained. "You leave him alone a great deal."

"I can't take him to lectures."

"I'm sure he'd behave very well. But, as I was saying, you leave him alone and I was sorry for him, and so he sometimes comes and visits me, and we're great friends, aren't we, Gantry Bill?"

"You know his name?" the young man exclaimed.

"Of course. I'm not deaf, and the street is not wide. Oh, dear! whatever shall I do about the eggs?"

"Where did you get them, and we'll go and get some more?"

"But I haven't any more money, and we always pay for them."

"Of course, you must allow me to pay for them. My dog broke them."

"If you wouldn't mind—just for to-day. You see, if I don't take them back aunt couldn't make an omelette for Mr. Wycherly's dinner."

"Let's go and get them at once. We can get them at the nearest grocer's."

"Oh, you needn't trouble to come with me. I must go back, for aunt won't get eggs anywhere else. If you could lend me the shilling——"

"I'm going to carry those eggs, and see you safé home. You might feel faint or something after such a shock."

Jane-Anne laughed, but she did not forbid him to accompany her. Gantry Bill gambolled on ahead, and together they bought another shilling's worth of eggs from Mrs. Dew's old woman.

As they walked down the Iffley Road together, he said rather diffidently: "Gantry Bill is more fortunate than his master, since he seems to know you, Miss Wycherly."

"My name's not Wycherly," Jane-Anne answered. "It's Stavrides. I'm no relation to Mr. Wycherly; my aunt is his housekeeper, and he let's me live there. I love him dearly."

"My name's George Gordon."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "*Are* you any relation to Lord Byron?"

"Certainly not, I'm glad to say," he remarked decidedly. "We're quite another lot of Gordons. It's a big clan, you know. We're the Dumfries-

shire Gordons. The poet was a gloomy sort of chap, wasn't he?"

Jane-Anne stood still, and gazed at the Gordon at her side with great indignation.

"Gloomy," she repeated, "sad, if you like sometimes, but *very* witty and amusing; have you read his letters?"

George Gordon hung his head; the brown eyes looking up into his were so grave and accusing.

"I'm afraid I know very little about him," he said, humbly; "perhaps he was an ancestor of yours—I'm awfully sorry——"

Again Jane-Anne laughed, and he thought she had the prettiest laugh. "Do you only defend people when they are your relations?" she asked. "I admire Lord Byron's poetry, and I am grateful to him because he gave his life for my country—but he's not the least little bit of an ancestor. I don't think I've got any."

"That must be rather jolly, because then you can play off your own bat, and people aren't always expecting things of you because your great-great-uncle did something or other last century."

"Oh, I'd like them if I'd got them," she said; "but as I haven't—it's no use fretting. Have you a great many?"

"Nothing to speak of," he said, blushing. "I can't think how we've got on to such a footling subject. You like Gantry Bill, don't you?"

"He's a perfect dear, but why is he called Gantry Bill? What's gantry mean—I looked it up in the dictionary, and it says——"

"Oh, it's nothing to do with that—it's some soldiers' lingo—he belonged to my elder brother; he's a gunner and he had to go to Nigeria and couldn't take him, so he gave him to me. He's a faithful beast, and understands every word you say to him."

By this time they had reached Long Wall, and as they strolled along in intimate converse they met Miss Willows, who looked hard at Jane-Anne and her escort carrying the basket of eggs.

When they reached the archway leading into the builder's yard, Jane-Anne stopped and bade him farewell.

"I can't pay you the shilling now," she said, "for I haven't got one, but the minute I have one I'll bring it over. I've spent my allowance for this month already."

"Oh, please," he said, looking most unhappy, "please don't speak of it. I broke the eggs, at least Bill did—so, of course——"

"Good-bye," said Jane-Anne, and vanished in at the side-door.

George Gordon crossed the road very slowly, with Gantry Bill following sedately at his heels; when they reached his sitting-room he sank heavily into the chair by the window, and the bull-terrier leapt up on to his seat on the window-sill.

"I say, Bill," his master asked, "how have you contrived to see so much of her?"

The shilling weighed heavily on Jane-Anne's mind. She could not repay it herself, for she had spent four-and-elevenpence-halfpenny on the first

of May, the day she got her allowance, on a pair of black silk stockings declared to be "half-price," which she had greatly coveted to dance in.

Mrs. Dew would undoubtedly repay the shilling, but she would, at the same time, ask so many questions and comment so severely on Jane-Anne's carelessness, and (this was what Jane-Anne particularly dreaded) express such horror at her "forwardness" in walking home with George Gordon, that Jane-Anne simply could not summon up enough moral courage to confess herself to her aunt.

Therefore, as had happened hundreds of times in the past, there was nothing for it but to go to "the master" who would, she knew, get her out of the difficulty, and ask no questions. Yet—she felt shy even of the master.

Suppose he forbade her ever to speak to George Gordon or Gantry Bill again?

Still, the shilling must be got back to George Gordon that night, and it was already seven o'clock, time for her to lay dinner. She ran up to Mr. Wycherly's study, and found him sitting in his arm-chair by the window reading Horace.

She went and stood before his chair, clasped her hands behind her, and announced:

"I broke a whole basketful of eggs, sir, this afternoon. They cost a shilling."

"Do you think," said Mr. Wycherly, smiling, "that the domestic exchequer will stand such a heavy drain upon it?"

"But that's not all," she continued, breathlessly. "He picked me up, and as I hadn't another

shilling he paid for the eggs, and I've spent all my money, and can't pay him back till June. Will you lend me the money to pay him?"

Mr. Wycherly no longer lounged in his chair. He sat up very straight, but he spoke gently as usual, saying:

"Do you mind explaining to me who 'he' is, and why you should need to be picked up?"

"Gantry Bill, that's his dog, bounced at me from behind; we're great friends and he was glad to see me, and I was thinking deeply, and he knocked me over and the eggs flew all about and made a great mess, so he helped me up and we went together to buy more eggs, and he carried them home for me."

"Gantry Bill, as you call him," Mr. Wycherly said, his eyes twinkling, "seems a very remarkable dog. First, he knocks you down, then he picks you up and gives you a shilling to buy eggs, which he politely carries home for you. Is it this intelligent animal that you propose to repay?"

"No," said Jane-Anne, blushing hotly; "it's the intelligent animal's master. He lives just opposite. He's at New College."

"And is it he who is such a great friend of yours?" Mr. Wycherly asked, as though it were the most natural conclusion possible.

"No," said Jane-Anne, rosier than ever; "I never spoke to him before, though I knew him by sight. He's rather nice," she added; "his name is George Gordon, but he's no relation to dear Lord Byron—and he doesn't seem a bit sorry. May I take the shilling over?"

"I think," said Mr. Wycherly, "that perhaps it would be better if I took him the shilling myself. After all, you know, the eggs were for the house, and therefore my affair."

"Oh, would you?" cried Jane-Anne. "That is perfectly lovely of you, and then you'll see him, and see if you like him."

"Exactly," said Mr. Wycherly, "that's why I want to go."

"You will give it back to-night, won't you?" she begged.

"Directly after dinner; I hope he will be at home."

"Oh, he's sure to be at home," she said simply. "He generally sings then; I hear him while I'm working. He sings 'Maid of Athens' most beautifully."

"Does he indeed?" said Mr. Wycherly.

CHAPTER XIX

THE STARLING FLIES AWAY

"What is to come we know not. But we know
That what has been was good. . . .
Let the great winds their worst and wildest blow,
Or the gold weather round us mellow slow:
We have fulfilled ourselves, and we can dare
And we can conquer, though we may not share
In the rich quiet of the afterglow
What is to come."

W. E. HENLEY.

WHILE Mr. Wycherly was still sitting over his port, Mrs. Dew brought him a note that had come by hand. He opened it, and found that it was from Miss Willows. Now, Mr. Wycherly knew very little of Miss Willows. She had, it is true, been to tea with Jane-Anne on two occasions, when the child had implored him to be present. Of course, Jane-Anne was dying to "show him" to Miss Willows. That lady felt his charm, but she doubted whether he was a very safe or suitable guardian for so unusual a girl. What she had seen that afternoon convinced her that her doubts were justified, and she felt that not a moment must be lost. It was necessary to awake in him a sense of his responsibilities, therefore she wrote:

"Dear Mr. Wycherly,

"I feel sure you will acquit me of any desire to be fussily interfering if I venture to ask whether it is with your knowledge and approval that Jane-Anne walks with undergraduates in the evening after tea. I hope you know me too well to imagine that any foolish prudery, or even an exaggerated sense of the importance of Mrs. Grundy's opinion causes me to bring the subject before you. It is only that while Jane-Anne is so young, while she is working so hard, it would be wiser, I think, to discourage intimate association with the other sex except under proper auspices. Pray do not mistake me. I should like Jane-Anne to have plenty of young male society but not to saunter about the roads *tête-à-tête* with any one youth during term time. If you can see your way to oblige me in this I shall be grateful.

"Very faithfully yours,

"Dorothy Willows."

Mr. Wycherly read the note twice very carefully, folded it, put it back in the envelope and, without waiting to finish his port, went for his hat. He crossed the road. Mr. Gordon, seated as usual at his open window with Gantry Bill in attendance, saw him coming, turned extremely red and went himself to open the door, without waiting for his visitor to knock.

Jane-Anne, seated at her studies in the parlour, also saw Mr. Wycherly's pilgrimage across the road, and was filled with satisfaction that her debt was to be so speedily discharged.

"Are you Mr. Gordon?" Mr. Wycherly

asked, as the door was opened before he could knock.

"I am; will you come in, sir?"

Mr. Wycherly accepted the invitation and came in. The experience caused his heart to beat a little faster. It was so many years since he had been in an undergraduate's room. The past came back with a rush. What a lot of water had flowed under Magdalen Bridge since those dear, far off, happy, and, afterwards, most miserable days.

"Won't you sit down, sir?" young Gordon said hospitably.

Mr. Wycherly sat down. "I come," he said, "to discharge a debt," and laid a shilling on the table beside him, "and I must thank you for carrying home the eggs for my ward."

"It's very good of you," the young man mumbled, looking much confused; "it was nothing really; you see, my dog was the cause of the accident. I was bound to replace the eggs."

"My ward begged me to pay her debt at once. That is my reason for invading you at such an unseasonable hour, but since you have received me so hospitably, I wonder if you would further allow me to ask you a question, Mr. Gordon?"

There was no light in the room save the grey gloaming of a May evening. Across the road Mr. Wycherly could see a brilliant, luminous square defining his own parlour window; he was too short-sighted to see the studious figure seated at the table, but he perceived that she must be plainly visible to those possessing normal sight.

"Certainly, sir," young Gordon said politely.

"You probably"—here Mr. Wycherly turned a kind, inquiring gaze upon his young host—"have sisters?" Mr. Gordon bowed. "I have been out of the way of these things for so long that it is possible I may make mistakes—I shall be extremely obliged if you will tell me—quite frankly, do you think we do wrong in allowing Miss Stavrides to walk about Oxford by herself?"

George Gordon looked very hot indeed. The last thing he had dreamt of was that this dignified, white-haired old gentleman should consult him about anything. Honest himself, he was touched at the evident earnestness and simplicity that craved his opinion. Acting almost automatically, he lit the gas and stood well in the centre of the light, looking fairly and squarely at his guest.

"Since you do me the honour to ask me, sir, I should say that there is not the smallest harm in allowing Miss Stavrides to walk alone anywhere. If she were my sister, I shouldn't be a bit afraid because, you see, she's not that sort——"

"Yes," said Mr. Wycherly; "please tell me why."

"It's a little difficult," the young man continued, "without sounding a bit of a cad—but it's like this. She walks along thinking her own thoughts, and if she looks at you—she seems to look through you. Now, there *are* girls, nice girls, pretty girls—ladies—quite ladies, you know

—and yet you know they've seen you. Well, all I can say is, you're jolly well sure Miss Stavrides hasn't—and so it's no good."

"And yet," Mr. Wycherly said smoothly, "she seemed to be aware of your existence."

George Gordon thrust his hands deep into his pockets, but he still looked Mr. Wycherly straight in the eyes.

"She couldn't help that. My dog—somehow—upon my honour, I don't know how or why, seems awfully fond of her. He knocked her down jumping on her playfully, when she didn't expect it—and what could I do? But—I think it's only fair to tell you, I've been dying to know her ever since I came to these rooms, and I hope I shall see her again. She is, I suppose you know it, sir, an extremely attractive girl, because she's so unusual."

Mr. Wycherly rose and held out his hand:

"I am greatly obliged to you," he said. "You have been very frank and helpful. It will give me great pleasure if you will come and see us—and as a personal favour, I would ask you not to walk in the streets with her again, for her sake."

"I should like awfully to come, sir. It's very kind of you. It's my last term, so you won't be troubled with me for long."

Gantry Bill rose slowly and majestically from his place in the window, dropped to the floor, and came and sniffed at Mr. Wycherly. George Gordon pulled himself together with a mighty effort, and said somewhat huskily: "You know,

ir, I think she ought to have a blind or omething. Anyone can see her."

Mr. Wycherly stooped to pat Gantry Bill.

"I am still very much in your debt," he said.

* * * *

That summer Montagu went in the vacation with a reading party to Brittany. Mr. Wycherly took Edmund and Jane-Anne to Burnhead, in Midlothian, where he had spent so many years, and Mrs. Dew went to stay with Lord Dursley's housekeeper.

The minister lived in the house that had belonged to Miss Esperance, Mr. Wycherly and the two young people lodged with her old servant, Robina. While they were there Curly came to see the minister, who was his father, and during the week he spent in Burnhead, he made Jane-Anne, through Mr. Wycherly, the offer of a definite engagement in a company he was going on tour with after Christmas. She would, of course, at first only walk on. After that she would be entrusted with small parts and then—her chance might come. The company was good in more senses than one. The actresses were ladies, two of them married to members of the company, and Jane-Anne would be well looked after.

The project flung Mr. Wycherly into a perfect tempest of worry. Had Curly so much as hinted the possibility of such a thing to Jane-Anne herself, he would have felt that he had just cause for grievance. But he knew that Curly had done nothing of the kind, and that it lay with him, and

with him only, to suppress or put before her this to him, detestable plan.

There could be but one outcome. Mr. Wycherly's sense of honour would not allow him to conceal from Jane-Anne an opportunity he feared she would be only too ready to grasp. And that same sense precluded his laying the matter before her himself. He knew that he was so biassed that he must place the whole scheme in a most unattractive light; and his very faculty for seeing all round a question prevented his expressing the actively hostile views he most certainly held. Therefore, he left Curly to lay the question before her.

This Curly did, and actuated, perhaps, by a somewhat similar spirit to Mr. Wycherly's, he hid from the girl nothing of the disagreeables she was likely to encounter. He painted the life of little more than a super with a travelling company as the reverse of pleasant. He spared her no sordid detail, he exaggerated rather than minimised all she would have to endure.

With downcast eyes and lips that trembled a little, she heard him in silence to the end. Then she turned her large gaze upon him, and asked:

"But shall I learn things?"

"It is the only way to learn things."

"Then, if the master will let me, I will come."

"He doesn't like it. He hates the idea. It will make him very unhappy. He will miss you dreadfully."

"Montagu will be at New College then. He will be always in and out. I wouldn't go if the

master would be all alone. But with Montagu there—it makes all the difference——"

"I don't know even now that he will consent."

"I think," said Jane-Anne, "that he will allow me to go, because he is so just."

But Mr. Wycherly refused to give a definite opinion.

"We will wait till December," he said.

So Jane-Anne went back to school, and Mr. Wycherly sent for Miss Willows and explained the situation to her. To his surprise and dismay she sided with Jane-Anne. This was fine of Miss Willows, for she had set her heart on Jane-Anne's doing brilliantly at Lady Margaret Hall. But she understood the girl. She realised her powers and her limitations, and she was one who, in looking into the future for her girls, would fain have them hitch their horses to the stars. She believed that Jane-Anne might become a fairly successful teacher, but she was certain that she had it in her to become a great actress. Miss Willows detested mediocrity.

An unexpected ally for Mr. Wycherly appeared in the person of George Gordon, who, having got a moderate degree, came back to Oxford to see everybody before he settled in London to read for the bar. With him he brought Gantry Bill as an offering for Jane-Anne, who embraced the dog fondly, exclaiming:

"I shall love him, if the master will keep him for me, but I don't expect I shall be here after Christmas, you know, except when I can get away for a little holiday."

"Not here?" he exclaimed. "Where are you going—abroad to study?"

"No, I'm probably going on the stage—at least to study for the stage."

"The stage. *You?*"

"Why not?"

"Because it's unthinkable, because I hate it, because—I want you so myself."

Jane-Anne looked very serious, but she didn't blush or show any signs of confusion.

"I shouldn't make a nice wife," she remarked

"I think you would make an adorable wife—but, of course, we couldn't marry just yet," he added honestly, "I've not got enough to make you comfortable, but we could wait—and I'll work like the dickens and—you're very young."

"For the matter of that, so are you, but it isn't a question of youth or age. There's something I've got to do, and I must do it. Marrying and things like that must come after. I fancy"—here she raised her solemn, candid eyes—"everything will come after—always."

George Gordon looked so miserable that Gantry Bill went to him, stretched up and licked one of the hands that hung so limp and melancholy at his sides.

"Mr. Wycherly would have liked it," he said sadly. "I spoke to him last night, and he gave me leave to come to-day. He would have allowed us to be engaged."

Jane-Anne gave a little laugh. "I *am* engaged," she said, "to Mr. Wendover's touring company."

"Damn Mr. Wendover!" exclaimed her angry

suitor. "I'm awfully sorry, but you can't think how I hate it. Will you keep Bill? Mr. Wycherly said he might stay here. I can't have him in London, he'd be so miserable."

"We shall love Bill," she said gently.

Towards Christmas a bazaar was held in which Mrs. Methuen was much interested, and among the side-shows was a little duologue which she and Jane-Anne played together. It happened that Curly's company was in Oxford at the time, and one afternoon he dragged Mr. Wycherly to the bazaar to see Jane-Anne act.

Now, although Mr. Wycherly had seen her dance hundreds of times, he had never seen her act. He could not screw his courage to the point of facing the crowd of parents assembled at the school theatricals, and Mrs. Methuen had never yet induced him to come and see the little plays she was so fond of getting up in aid of various charities.

This time, however, wearied by Curly's importunities and fortified by his company, he was persuaded, and found himself seated in front of a red curtain, in the second row of chairs, while, pince-nez on nose, he studied a programme which bore the legend "A Joint Household."

Jane-Anne had gone to lunch with Mrs. Methuen so as to be ready for the play which came fairly early in the afternoon.

The noisy piano ceased, the curtain was rung up, and the two ladies, who, with their husbands, had agreed to share a house for the summer

holidays, one after the other appeared upon the scene.

Mrs. Methuen was unmistakable; pretty, eager, much concerned for the future comfort of her absent lord.

But the other—

Mr. Wycherly was both disappointed and bewildered.

Something must have happened to Jane-Anne. Could she be ill? This tall, angular person in spectacles, with what he secretly stigmatized as a "bombazine manner" must be some elderly lady imported at the last moment to play the part. That she played it uncommonly well did not concern Mr. Wycherly; he was anxious about Jane-Anne.

What could have happened to the child?

The play was quite amusing. The lady with the bombazine manner raised a laugh whenever she opened her lips, but Mr. Wycherly couldn't feel interested. He was worried.

It must be some sudden and prostrating headache that had prevented her appearance. Yet when did he ever remember Jane-Anne to have a headache when theatricals were to the fore.

The little play soon came to an end amidst enthusiastic applause. Mr. Wycherly thought it rather unfeeling of Curly to clap so vigorously. He didn't seem a bit anxious about Jane-Anne.

The plaudits were so prolonged that the curtain was raised again and the two ladies took their call. She of the spectacles and wispy grey hair dragged into a tight knob at the back, bowed stiffly and ungraciously as befitted her character

but just as she reached the wings she snatched off her spectacles with one hand and with the other deliberately blew a kiss to Mr. Wycherly.

There was no mistaking it. The kiss was for him and for no one else, and the eyes hitherto discreetly hidden behind the spectacles were exceeding dark and young and merry.

Then it was that Mr. Wycherly realised that she had not failed at the last moment, this extraordinary Jane-Anne of his. *She* was the lady of the bombazine manner.

When they reached the street he murmured to Curly in almost awe-struck tones, "and I never recognised her at all till the curtain went up the second time."

"So I saw," said Curly.

"She looked so old, so severe, so hard somehow and unlovely."

"For the time being, she was Mrs. Tallet, you see," Curly explained.

"It wasn't her appearance only, her whole atmosphere seemed so grasping and grim."

"That," Curly remarked sententiously, "is acting."

* * * *

It was gala day at the dancing-class, and Mr. Wycherly sat on the raised daïs reserved for parents and onlookers. He had come to watch Jane-Anne as a pupil for the last time.

There were many "fancy dances" performed by fresh-faced girls who manipulated their accordion-pleated skirts with a certain pretty pride in their achievement—all but Jane-Anne.

She, slender and dark, with little oval face and shadowy heavy hair, drawn back from her forehead, with the upward sweep of Botticelli's angels —she danced!

She wore a plain little frock of black chiffon, caught in round her slender waist by a narrow black cord.

Mrs. Methuen had chosen the dress, and it was full of distinction in its dainty severity, such a plain little dress among its rainbow-hued, fresh-millinered companions.

And how she danced!

Floating to and fro on the waves of sound like an autumn leaf blown by the wind.

Suddenly, by one of those flashes of telepathy that on occasion lighten across the path of all of us, Mr. Wycherly became acutely conscious that his was not the only soul stirred by this perfect dancing. And the knowledge that his enthusiastic appreciation was shared stirred in him no feeling save that of uncomfortable foreboding.

He put on his eye-glasses and looked across the room. There, near the door, he saw Curly accompanied by a small, fair man in a fur coat, a clean-shaven man whose full blue eyes expressed both interest and pleasure, pleasure keen as his own had been. And there was subtly communicated to Mr. Wycherly a sense of impending change, and a sensation of excited interrogation, so strong that he found himself mentally demanding: "What will he do?"

And the ecstasy with which he had at first

watched Jane-Anne was interrupted and invaded by a host of alien doubts and speculations.

For he knew that the fates were busy weaving, and that the central figure in their fabric was that of the slender girl in black who danced.

And nothing happened.

Curly and the man in the fur coat went away in a few minutes, and neither of them had attempted to speak to Jane-Anne when her dance ended.

But, all the same, the end was the end Mr. Wycherly had refused to face. When it actually came to the point of granting or withholding his permission, he bade her God speed and sent her forth. The flame in her shone luminous and clear; there was no questioning it; and it seemed to him the better part to feed the fire that burned so steadily on the altar of her high endeavour.

Mrs. Dew neither approved nor opposed. For some years now she had felt Jane-Anne was growing beyond her; always incomprehensible, she was now on a plane that her good aunt could only touch by means of the steady affection she had always felt. That way she could always reach Jane-Anne. Since her niece was not to be a respectable servant in a good family, it seemed to Mrs. Dew that all other careers were equally chimerical and dangerous. The girl might try this play-acting. If it failed—why, the master would have her back. Mrs. Dew was sure of that, and was therefore less anxious than might have been expected.

With a diffidence she had never shown before, she followed Jane-Anne into her bedroom the afternoon before she left Holywell, and stood at the end of the bed watching the tall girl on her knees beside the new trunk she herself had given her.

"Look here, Jane-Anne," she said, suddenly, and because she was very much in earnest she lapsed into the broad Gloucestershire of her youth. "I'm not one as can talk religious, a good sharp scoldin's more in my line—but I'd be glad that you should remember as you come of a most respectable family. There's bin Burfords in Great Stanley for two 'undred year, and so far as we do know, never a light woman amongst 'em."

"Two hundred years," Jane-Anne echoed. "Why, then I must have ancestors, after all."

"You can call 'em ancestors, if you do please," Mrs. Dew continued, "we do call 'em forbears where I comes from. Well, as I was sayin', I'd have you remember, an' if you feels carried away and giddy-like, just think as there's a hold aunt down in Oxford as sets great store by you——"

Mrs. Dew's voice broke; Jane-Anne rose hastily from her knees and ran to her aunt, and took her in her arms.

"Aunt, dear," she said, "I will remember."

"I never 'eard," Mrs. Dew went on in a muffled tone, "anything to speak of about your father's people. For all I know, he might 'ave come from some of them 'eathen gods and goddesses, bad lots they were, and it's that as makes me so worrited. Burford blood you can depend on

—but I m sure as it's the Grecian comin' out as drives you to play-acting."

Very gently Jane-Anne withdrew her arms from about her aunt.

"I know I'm often silly," she said, humbly, "but you musn't blame my father for that."

"You're as the Lard made you," Mrs. Dew remarked drily, "and you can but try and make the best of a bad job. But remember this—if you feels ill, or if you wants me any time for any reason, a telegram'll bring me just every bit as quick as I can put foot to the ground and find somebody to do for the master while I be away. You bear that in mind."

"You're very good to me, aunt," said Jane-Anne, and flung her arms round Mrs. Dew's neck once more.

She and Mr. Wycherly went to evensong in the cathedral. It was the fourth of January, and the "proper psalms" were the twenty-second and the twenty-third. Jane-Anne shivered with a chilly sense of foreboding as the wailing chant rang out, echoing eerily in the great arched roof.

"*I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart also in the midst of my body is even like melting wax.*"

Presently the minor changed to something infinitely serene and sweet and comforting; and to Jane-Anne standing timidly on the threshold of her new life, there was promise of help that could not fail her in the assurance:

"*The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing.*" And at the final verse: "*But Thy loving*

kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life . . ." she thrust her little hand into that of her old friend, and his closed over it with a firm and understanding clasp.

When the day, so charged with various emotions, came to an end, and she went to bid him good-night, she found him standing on the hearth-rug in the firelight. Montagu had gone for a few days to a school-friend before he came up to New College, and they were all alone.

Mr. Wycherly's lamp was turned out, but the room was full of warm, rosy light, and Jane-Anne remembered how she had looked in and longed wistfully to share in his kind glance, all those long years ago. They had had many talks together, those two, over the coming change, and each knew the other's hopes and fears. The old must realise that farewells are their portion. Only a month or two before Mr. Wycherly had seen Edmund set out on his first voyage, and now this other child was sailing forth on the great sea of life, leaving him behind to dream and pray that fortune and fair winds might enwheel them both.

She came and stood beside him, laying light, gentle hands upon his shoulders, looking at him the while with the kind, faithful eyes he loved so well.

"Dear," she said, "do you know at all how I feel?"

"My child," he answered, "you feel, I know, everything that is best and most beautiful, but there is just one thing that I would like you to write upon the tablets of your heart, and that is,

the remembrance that here, in Oxford, there is an old man who would give his life's blood to serve you; to whom all that concerns you is absolutely vital. Will you remember always that, whether you are glad or sorry, successful or unfortunate, most of all if ever—which God forbid—you should be unfortunate—your home is here."

"I will remember," said Jane-Anne, and kissed him.

No one went with her next day to London. She preferred to go alone. Curly was to meet her, and she was to start that night with the rest of the company for the town in the north where their first engagement was.

Gantry Bill wandered disconsolately about the house in Holywell all that day. He could settle nowhere. His beautiful tranquillity was quite broken up. He pattered to and fro, and whined faintly at intervals. Mrs. Dew tempted him in vain with the choicest morsels in his special bowl.

At last, after dinner, he sought Mr. Wycherly in his study, scratching vigorously at the door until he was admitted. Once in, he walked about sniffing dubiously; finally, going to Mr. Wycherly, and with his paws across his knees, leant heavily upon him, and looked up in his face, plainly asking, "Where is she?"

This was Gantry Bill's favourite attitude with Jane-Anne. He was too big and heavy for her to nurse, but he loved to stand on his hind legs and lean his body across her knees, while she, generally immersed in a book, absently stroked his head.

"She's gone, Gantry Bill," Mr. Wycherly said, in answer to his look. "She has gone away and left us, and we must just make the best of it."

Gantry Bill gave a sudden lurch and arranged his whole heavy person across Mr. Wycherly's knees. He weighed forty-four pounds, but somehow Mr. Wycherly had not the heart to drive him away.

Instead, he stroked him absently, and murmured:

"Say I'm weary, say I'm sad;
Say that health and wealth have missed me;
Say I'm growing old, but add—
Jenny kissed me."

THE END

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